

# Telling Freud's Story: The Fictionalization of Freud

Author: Kirstin M Kramer

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# **Telling Freud's Story: The Fictionalization of Freud**

**Kirstin M. Kramer**

**A Senior Honors Thesis, Advised by Professor Robin Lydenberg  
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## A Note on the Cover

*Sigmund*, by Vik Muniz, is a color photograph of a drawing made with chocolate syrup on a piece of white plastic. It is reproduced here in black and white.

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# Introduction

Sigmund Freud. The father of psychoanalysis. He haunts the popular consciousness: an older man with white hair and a white beard, often holding a cigar. His name and his theories have been appropriated for everyday use -- Freudian slips, the ego, the Oedipus complex. Popular culture has invoked his image for cartoons and merchandise, in books and films. Freud is everywhere, an immediately recognizable figure, loaded with associations and connotations.

## The “Frood Dude”

Freud continues to appear in the most unlikely places: he has appeared as a character in nearly 25 movies, Nicholas Meyer pairs him with Sherlock Holmes in the book *The Seven-percent Solution*, and a character on the popular teledrama *The O.C.* answered her door wearing “Freudian slippers.” In 1989, Freud was ‘kidnapped’ from the past along with Abraham Lincoln, Socrates and Joan of Arc in the movie *Bill & Ted’s Excellent Adventure*. The film chronicles the adventures of a pair of slackers who travel through time in a telephone booth, collecting historical figures so they will not fail their history presentation. The phone booth lands in 1901 Vienna just as Freud is leaving his apartment. He is confronted by Ted (played by Keanu Reeves) leaping out of the phone booth and exclaiming, “How’s it going, Frood-Dude?” Freud stares and tells himself, “This must be a dream,” just before he is lassoed by Billy the Kid and dragged into the phone booth.

Freud is portrayed in the film by the actor Rod Loomis. Loomis’ Freud is immediately recognizable: neatly cut white hair and trimmed white beard, wire rimmed glasses and a gray three piece suit that is familiar from countless pictures of Freud. When he first appears, he is

wearing a hat and smoking a cigar. He alternates between German and English. The physical impersonation is convincing and the film's portrayal is designed to recall all of the ideas most commonly associated with Freud. His first line -- "This must be a dream" -- immediately reminds the viewer of Freud's work on the interpretation of dreams. The humor of Loomis' portrayal depends on the audience's knowledge of Freud, shamelessly invoking popular preconceptions about Freud.

A later scene places Freud with Billy the Kid and Socrates in the food court at a suburban mall. Freud buys a corn dog while Billy and Socrates wander over to talk to a pair of girls. Freud comes over with his corn dog and introduces himself: "Hello, I'm Dr. Freud. But you may call me 'Siggy.'" The girls look at each other and giggle, prompting Freud to say, "You both seem to be suffering from a mild form of hysteria." At this, one of the girls takes offense and says, "Oh god, you are *such* a geek" as they get up to leave. Billy the Kid turns to Freud and says, "Way to go, egghead"; Socrates leans in and exclaims, "Geek!"; they both leave and Freud is left, forlornly clutching his corn dog, to inquire, "What is a 'geek'?"

Apart from the obvious absurdity of its premise, much of the humor in this scene comes from its willingness to play with the public perception of Freud. The man who walks up and introduces himself as 'Siggy' is a direct challenge to the image of Freud as the dignified doctor. The reference to hysteria both recalls the disease that originally led Freud into his studies of psychoanalysis and plays upon the way that the meaning of 'hysteria' has changed from Freud's time to the present: no longer a nervous disorder thought to be connected to a disturbance of the uterus, its meaning has been reduced to imply something hilariously funny. For the attentive viewer, there is another level of allusive humor in the fact that Freud's corn dog noticeably

droops as the girls reject him and get up to leave. In the popular mind, every elongated object becomes a phallic symbol.

In a later scene, at the police station after the historical figures have been arrested for wreaking havoc at the mall, Freud has an encounter with a police psychiatrist. The man tries to psychoanalyze Freud and is utterly frustrated by the fact that Freud is attempting to psychoanalyze him in turn:

POLICE PSYCHIATRIST: I want to know why you claim to be Sigmund Freud.

FREUD: Why do you claim I'm not Sigmund Freud?

POLICE PSYCHIATRIST: Why do you keep asking me questions?

FREUD: (leans in) Tell me about your mother.

POLICE PSYCHIATRIST: Oh, God. (gets up)

FREUD: Would you like a couch to lie on?

POLICE PSYCHIATRIST: No, I don't want a couch to lie on. (walks away)

Their exchange is a deliberate parody of psychoanalysis, with each of them trying to ask leading questions and establish control over the exchange. The police psychiatrist, of course, is no match for Sigmund Freud, who invented the discipline, and eventually he gives up in disgust. The conversation also refers to two more popular clichés about Freud: the mother and the couch. The demand, "Tell me about your mother," is practically shorthand for Freudian analysis, drawing on Freud's theory that all of an individual's relationships in life are a reenactment of the first relationship with the mother. The couch is another traditional marker of psychoanalysis; Freud's patients famously reclined on a couch facing away from him during treatment in order to facilitate free association.

The climax of the movie is Bill and Ted's triumphant history presentation -- a bizarre cross between a presentation and a rock show. Freud impresses the audience with his masterful analysis of Ted: "Therefore, Ted's father's own fear of failure has caused him to make his son the embodiment of all his own deepest anxieties about himself. And, hence, his aggression

transference onto Ted.” The scene is a strangely familiar one: Ted lies on a gurney that has been set up as a makeshift couch while Freud stands slightly behind him. Again, this is a sort of shorthand for psychoanalysis, dependent for its effectiveness on the audience’s prior knowledge of the workings of Freud’s discipline. Freud’s summation, which is the only part of the analysis that the viewer witnesses, touches lightly on the ideas of transference and anxiety -- two more Freudian buzzwords. And when Freud turns to Bill after his virtuosic conclusion to ask whether he would like to be analyzed as well, Bill backs away and says, “Naw, just got a minor Oedipal complex.” The invocation of Freud’s most familiar theory has been prepared throughout the movie: Bill’s father has just remarried, wedding a girl who graduated high school the year after Bill and Ted started.

The portrayal of Freud in *Bill & Ted’s Excellent Adventure* is humorous because it utilizes the audience’s knowledge about Freud. Dreams, hysteria, the psychoanalyst’s couch and the Oedipus complex -- the image of Freud that appears in popular culture is a simplistic one. It deliberately reduces Freud to a white-haired man with a cigar, to a set of buzzwords, to “Siggy.”

### **Popular resistance**

Why are we so eager to laugh at Freud? In a sense, it is far easier to laugh at Freud than it is to take him seriously. Taking Freud seriously requires that we take seriously the idea that we do not truly know ourselves, that there are parts of us that exist outside our knowledge and control. Taking Freud seriously requires an admission that we do not always know what motivates our actions, what preconceptions inform the way we think, what conflicts we are playing out in our relationships. Taking Freud seriously requires the admission that his ideas are *threatening* -- that his ideas are threatening *to us*. We too have unconscious minds. We too are



locked in an eternal struggle to know ourselves. The man with the cigar muttering in German is *safe*; reducing Freud's theories to sex and mothers (and sex *with* mothers) removes their threat.

To borrow some terminology from psychoanalysis, there is a resistance in the popular consciousness to Freud's ideas. We are eager to debunk them, to criticize them, to mock them, because we do not wish to confront them. We laugh at Freud in order to defend ourselves from Freud; we reduce him to a set of clichés because we are afraid of what he could tell us about ourselves -- or force us to see about ourselves. We reduce him to a caricature so we do not have to confront him as a person.

### **In search of Sigmund Freud**

The very fact that we laugh at Freud so determinedly suggests that we have not succeeded in completely neutralizing his threat. The reality of Freud can still be found, if we can steel ourselves to look for him. The obvious place to begin the search for the reality of Freud is with Freud himself. Freud's work is saturated with his presence: they are the products of his conscious mind, but they are also haunted by the preoccupations of his unconscious. The Freud revealed in works like *The Interpretation of Dreams* or *An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* is a Freud who is by turns confidant and insecure, an insightful thinker and a concerned doctor, frustrated, smug and a thousand things in between. Yet this Freud is in some ways just as artificial as the Freud who psychoanalyzes Ted on a gurney in a high school auditorium. Freud is an accomplished and a profoundly self-conscious author; many aspects of his self-presentation are deliberately orchestrated. Freud is constructing himself for his readers' eyes, telling his own story and defining himself before the world. The line between fiction and reality is quickly

blurred as Freud attempts to fit himself into his narrative, simultaneously embodying and trapping himself.

However, Freud is not the only person engaged in telling his story. Writing Freud, an author at once draws on and challenges the Freud that exists in his own writings, in the popular consciousness and in humanity's historical memory. Hélène Cixous embarks upon the unique challenge of re-writing the Dora case history as a play, creating a unique and challenging portrayal of Freud. Rather than reducing Freud in the way that popular culture does, Cixous engages Freud -- and Freud's persona -- in a critical and creative way.

# Part 1

## *The Interpretation of Dreams*

Freud's most well-known work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, was published in 1900. In addition to establishing his theories of dream interpretation, *The Interpretation of Dreams* is in a sense Freud's most personal work: many of the dreams that Freud analyzed in the book were his own. He reveals himself in the text as analyst, analysand and author.

The origins of the book can be found five years before its eventual publication, however. On July 24, 1895, Freud arrived at the realization at the core of his dream book: that all dreams represent the fulfillment of a wish. The dream that sparked this realization was the Irma dream, also called 'The dream of Irma's injection' and referred to in the text as 'The specimen dream.' The Irma dream was in every sense Freud's specimen dream: it is the first dream analyzed in *The Interpretation of Dreams* as an example of his theories and, more importantly, it was the analysis of this dream that led Freud to his theory of wish fulfillment.

During the summer of 1895, Freud was disturbed by a visit from his friend Otto, another doctor, who reported that Freud's patient Irma had not made a full recovery from her hysterical symptoms. Troubled by the implication that he had not done enough for Irma, Freud wrote a history of Irma's case for Dr. M, another friend and mentor. That night, he had a dream in which he encounters Irma at a gathering at his home. She complains that she still suffers from pain, so Freud examines her by peering down her throat. Disturbed by what he sees there, he calls Dr. M over to examine Irma; Otto and another doctor called Leopold take part in the examination as well. They conclude that her infection was caused by an injection of trimethylamin administered by Otto, probably with a dirty syringe.

## I.

On the surface, the analysis of the Irma dream examines Freud's anxiety about responsibility. Freud identifies the crux of the dream as the 'blame' for Irma's pains, and his desire to transfer that blame away from himself: "the words which I spoke to Irma in the dream showed that I was specially anxious not to be responsible for the pains which she still had" (141). He returns to this idea at the end of the analysis with a lengthy summation of the dream's multiple -- and contradictory -- proofs of his innocence:

*I was not to blame for Irma's pains, since she herself was to blame for them by refusing to accept my solution. I was not concerned with Irma's pains, since they were of an organic nature and quite incurable by psychological treatment. Irma's pains could be satisfactorily explained by her widowhood (cf. the trimethylamin) which I had not means of altering. Irma's pains had been caused by Otto giving her an incautious injection of an unsuitable drug -- a thing I should never have done. Irma's pains were the result of an injection with a dirty needle, like my old lady's phlebitis -- whereas I never did any harm with my injections. (152)*

Freud frames the dream as an elaborate defense of his own conscientiousness, one that calls up all of the reasons that argued against his responsibility for Irma's continued distress. He deliberately reveals his desire to avoid responsibility, to shift the blame to others, to vindicate himself and his ideas -- he reveals his *wish* that "[he] was not responsible for Irma's pains" (151). He makes himself vulnerable by exposing his wish and his insecurities to the reader.

But Freud's discomfort with Irma's pain is not limited to his own inability to solve her problems. There are other paths of interpretation present in the analysis which Freud deliberately does *not* draw attention to in his summation. In the dream. The pains with which the dream endows Irma -- pains not in keeping with her actual symptoms -- are not only significant for the response they draw from Freud, they are also significant in themselves.

In the dream, Irma complains of pains in her stomach and her throat, complaints which recall to Freud's mind two other women whose identities the dream entwines with Irma's. The

pains in her stomach remind him of his wife, who was pregnant at the time of the dream, and the pain in the throat recalls a friend of Irma's whom Freud had often wished to treat, a woman who, "like my Irma of the dream. . . suffered from hysterical choking" (142). The pain shared by the three women challenges Freud with two aspects of the 'problem' of women. The stomach pains of his pregnant wife, connected as they are to female sexuality and the reproductive capability of women, challenges him with the fact of sexual difference. The pain in the throat of Irma's friend -- pain that he only knew about because "Irma herself had betrayed the fact to me" (142) -- challenges him with the problem of female knowledge: of communication between women, a channel of communication that excludes him, 'choked off' in the face of his masculinity. Sexual difference and female knowledge manifest in the dream as pains, as complaints, as *problems* that Freud, as a doctor, must solve.

### **Sexual difference**

The specter of sexual difference haunts the Irma dream, consistently challenging Freud to reevaluate his own notions of sexuality and gender. The imagery of the dream itself is strikingly sexual. Erik Erikson points out that in a dream filled with deliberation and interpersonal communication, there are three arresting sensual images: "Only once -- at a decisive point in the middle of the dream -- there occurs a kinesthetic sensation. Otherwise, at the beginning as well as at the end of his dream the dreamer is 'all eyes.' Most outstanding in his visual field, so it seems, is, at one time, Irma's oral cavity, and, at another, the formula trimethylamin, printed in heavy type" (Erikson 256-7). The two visual experiences that Erikson identifies -- the visions of Irma's mouth and the trimethylamin formula -- flank what Erikson calls a 'kinesthetic sensation': the curious moment when Freud feels Irma's pain on his own body. All three of these

profoundly sensual moments relate to the dream's concern with sexuality and sexual difference. Freud moves from a visual experience to a tactile one, then pulls back in an attempt to reclaim the distance and objectivity associated with the visual.

The first of the dream's vivid images is the detailed description of Irma's open mouth. Irma, the female subject, appeals to Freud, the male doctor -- she opens her mouth, opens her body, to his examination. Later in the analysis, the structures Freud sees in Irma's throat will be explicitly related to the female sexual organs through his friend Fleiss's strange anatomical theories: "he had drawn scientific attention to some very remarkable connections between the turbinal bones and the female organs of sex (cf. the three curly structures in Irma's throat)" (150). Discomfited by what he finds in Irma's open mouth, by the vision of the interior of the female body, Freud appeals to his male colleagues for aid: "I at once called in Dr. M., and he repeated the examination and confirmed it. . . My friend Otto was now standing beside her as well, and my friend Leopold was percussing her through her bodice and saying: 'She has a dull area low down on the left.' He also indicated that a portion of the skin on the left shoulder was infiltrated" (140). The male doctors create a closed circle of masculine knowledge: they discuss Irma as though she were not there, peer into her mouth and percuss her body without acknowledging her presence as a conscious being. Freud retreats from the alarming vision of Irma's open mouth and seeks refuge in the circle of male professionals.

While Freud's initial interaction with Irma was an interaction with a vocal, resisting subject, by this point in the dream she has become an object for the inspection of Freud and his colleagues. In the face of their male expertise, Irma becomes a wholly passive, purely physical presence. Irma's open mouth is a shocking sight, but Freud is able to retreat to the comfort of professional objectivity; it is an interesting visual phenomenon, one whose disturbing qualities

can be diagnosed, uncovered and understood. Femininity becomes a mystery that can be solved by the male scientific community rather than an experience that must be engaged on the interpersonal level.

At this critical moment, something extraordinary occurs: Freud abandons his position as the objective physician, as the man who sees, and shares Irma's affliction. He writes, "I saw at once that this was the rheumatism in my own shoulder, which I invariably notice if I sit up late into the night. Moreover the wording in the dream was most ambiguous: '*I noticed this, just as he did. . . .*' I noticed it in my own body, that is" (146). Freud abandons his position in the circle of medical men and identifies with Irma, the female patient. Her pain is his pain, her body is his body. He notes that the wording of the dream was ambiguous, a hint that this dream sensation was somehow so disconcerting that he was unwilling or unable to express it directly. It is only the distance of time and scientific objectivity that allows him to acknowledge the connection between his body and Irma's.

Freud imaginatively transforms himself into the female subject, suffering with Irma. For Erikson, this 'decisive point in the middle of the dream' is a moment of crisis, a regression to an earlier stage of development. He writes, "the dreamer suddenly feels as if he were the sufferer and the examined, i.e., he, the doctor and man, fuses with the image of the *patient* and *woman*. This, of course, amounts to a surrender analogous to a spiritual conversion and a concomitant sacrifice of the male role" (Erikson 260). In Erikson's mind, this is a 'regression,' a 'surrender,' a 'sacrifice.' By identifying himself with a patient and a woman, Freud abandons his medical, male authority. Erikson argues:

Abandoning independent observation the dreamer gives in to a *diffusion of roles*. . . He thus forfeits his right to vigorous *male initiative* and guiltily surrenders to the inverted solution of the oedipal conflict, for a fleeting moment even becoming the feminine object for the superior males' inspection and percussion; and he denies his sense of stubborn

*autonomy*, letting *doubt* lead him back to the earliest infantile security: childlike *trust*. (Erikson 263)

Identifying himself with Irma means surrendering his autonomy, becoming an object -- becoming, by inference, an 'inferior' female or a naive child. Erikson's opinion of this contradictory moment is ultimately as ambiguous as Freud's own: Erikson concludes, "To overcome mankind's resistance, the dreamer had to learn to become his own patient and subject of investigation. . . to identify himself with himself in the double roles of observer and observed. . . [this] constituted an unfathomable division within the observer's self, a division of vague 'feminine yielding' and persistent masculine precision" (Erikson 272). This internal division, this loss of individual identity nonetheless allows Freud to grasp the beginnings of his theory of dreams.

Shoshana Felman, though she lacks Erikson's immediate assumption that identifying with the feminine is somehow a regression, also recognizes this moment of identification as the crucial turning point in Freud's ability to understand and treat female hysteria:

It is because he hears and feels the woman's suffering within himself, because he finds the feminine complaint inscribed in his own body, that Freud can, for the first time, cure hysteria, relieve -- if only partially -- Irma's anxiety. . . Contrary to received opinion, Freud was thus the first to not invalidate but, on the contrary, to listen to, and to devise new ways of listening to, the feminine complaint, even if he could only hear it partially -- through his own masculine defenses. (Felman 101-2)

Only by symbolically experiencing it himself can Freud understand Irma's pain and only by understanding it is he able to begin curing it. True insight comes, not through a male inspection of the female other, but through identification with the other. For Felman, this is a moment of profound progress, not a moment of regression. Unlike Erikson, she does not find Freud's flash of insight marred by its connection to the feminine other; rather, it is enriched by that connection.



Freud quickly retreats from this unsettling moment of identity confusion: the dream turns to a pronouncement from Dr. M. and the analysis returns to the idea of tuberculosis. By the final sense experience of the dream, Freud has returned to the more comfortable position of a spectator: “I saw before me the formula for [trimethylamin] printed in heavy type” (140). Of the three sense images, Freud seems to be least uncomfortable with this moment; here there is no gaping mouth to suggest female sexuality, no shared pain to raise questions of identity and identification. The vision of the trimethylamin is safely technical and medical. He confidently draws the reader’s attention to this moment, writing, “I saw the chemical formula of this substance in my dream, which bears witness to a great effort on the part of my memory. Moreover the formula was printed in heavy type, as though there had been a desire to lay emphasis on some part of the context as being of quite special importance” (149). Like his dream, Freud seems to make an extra effort to point out this moment as one of ‘quite special importance.’

The analysis of the formula lead Freud to Fleiss, and beyond Fleiss to the idea of sexuality. This is in fact the first explicit reference to sexuality in the analysis; Freud writes:

Thus this substance led me to sexuality, the factor to which I attributed the greatest importance in the origin of the nervous disorders which it was my aim to cure. My patient Irma was a young widow; if I wanted to find an excuse for the failure of my treatment in her case, what I could best appeal to would no doubt be this fact of her widowhood. . . The other woman, whom I had as a patient in the dream instead of Irma was also a young widow. (148)

Though he refers to sexuality as the most important factor in his theory, it is a factor which he does not bring up until the sexuality under discussion is clearly not his own. Indeed, the chemical formula for trimethylamin is quite the least obviously sexual sense experience that occurs in the dream. In this context, Freud can deal with sexuality on a professional and medical level without having to deal with it as an experience or a feeling. This is sexuality at its most

theoretical and its least threatening: Irma represents a female sexuality that is sterile, starved for the lack of a man; Fleiss, a male sexuality from which women are excluded.

Fleiss is introduced as “another friend who had for many years been familiar with all my writings during the period of their gestation, just as I had been with his” (149). Erikson gives a special meaning to the appearance of the word ‘gestation’ in this context, arguing that the dream’s references to pregnancy, fertility and female sexuality have been building to this moment. Freud’s “growing sense of harboring a discovery apt to *generate new thought*” mirrors his wife, who is carrying “an addition to the *younger generation*” (Erikson 262). She is pregnant with their child, he with his theory of psychoanalysis. Freud seeks to share his ‘gestation,’ however, not with his wife, but with Fleiss. Erikson argues: “That a man may incorporate another man’s spirit, that a man may conceive from another man, and that a man may be reborn from another, these ideas are the content of many fantasies and rituals which mark significant moments of male initiation, conversion and inspiration” (Erikson 272). Freud has conceived the idea of psychoanalysis (with Fleiss) just as his wife has conceived their child. Sexuality has been redefined, the troubling element of the feminine removed. The disturbing moment of identification with Irma has been replaced by the relative safety of male intellectual exchange.

### **Feminine mystery: The navel of the dream**

It is not so easy to dismiss the feminine, however. Freud himself identifies the curious moment of substitution of one woman for another, or several others, as the unfathomable center of the dream: “There is at least one spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable -- a navel, as it were, that is its point of contact with the unknown” (143). The language which he employs to

describe this moment is oddly mystical -- the unknown in question could be as narrow as the dreamer's own unconscious or as vast as the void beyond the uncharted horizons of human knowledge. Freud was unwilling to closely scrutinize the implications of substituting one woman for another in the dream, but concealed in the footnotes and between the lines of the analysis there is a profound discomfort about the results of this confrontation with the female other.

There are actually *three* women that lend their characteristics to Irma here. The first is a governess whom Freud once examined; Irma's unwillingness to open her mouth in the dream reminds him of the governess' attempts to conceal her false teeth. He writes, "at a first glance she had seemed a picture of youthful beauty, but when it came to opening her mouth she had taken measures to conceal her plates" (142). The incident with the governess raises questions of the dichotomy between appearance and reality, of the secrets and imperfections that women conceal beneath the surface. Opening her mouth reveals her secret, just as Freud wishes his patients to open their mouths and reveal their secrets to him, but he seems curiously ambivalent about the results of this process. He goes on to say, "This led to recollections of other medical examinations and of little secrets revealed in the course of them -- to the satisfaction of neither party" (142). This implies that there are some secrets that Freud simply does not wish to know, some secrets whose revelation causes embarrassment for the doctor as well as the patient.

This bizarre ambivalence occurs again when he examines the implications of Irma's friend's appearance more closely. Freud does not really seem to know what he wants from his patients. He imagines Irma's friend as an ideal patient, saying, "[Irma's] friend would have been wiser, that is to say she would have yielded sooner. She would then have *opened her mouth properly*, and have told me more than Irma" (143). Here he seems to equate female wisdom with

yielding, with surrendering her secrets and submitting to male expertise. Irma's friend is to be admired and praised for her projected willingness to reveal herself to Freud. Yet only a few lines before, Freud seemed almost admiring when he acknowledged that Irma's friend would probably never come to him for treatment: "Another reason was that *there was no need for her to do it*: she had so far show herself strong enough to master her condition without outside help" (143). From admiring her strength and ability to cope on her own, he moves quickly to wishing for her to be weak. The open mouth he wishes for is the symbolic opposite of the hysterical choking she suffers from; the yielding he desires contradicts the strength that he admires.

The third woman whose presence lurks behind Irma's is Freud's own wife. Her pregnancy is evoked by the stomach pains that Irma suffers; the pallor and puffiness that Irma displays in the dream also call her to Freud's mind. The dream itself takes place at a celebration of his wife's birthday and later in the analysis she is brought to mind again in connection with Otto's dirty syringe: "The phlebitis brought me back once more to my wife, who had suffered from thrombosis during one of her pregnancies" (151). The dream returns repeatedly to the idea of pregnancy and birth in connection with Freud's wife. Freud identifies her with Irma, the governess and Irma's friend as another woman who would resist his treatment. He writes, "She again was not one of my patients, nor should I have liked to have her as a patient, since I had noticed that she was bashful in my presence and I could not think she would make an amenable patient" (143). Freud repeats again his frustration with women who will not open their mouths and reveal their secrets to him. In Freud's wife, the mystery of female sexuality is combined with the frustration of female reticence.

Felman proposes that the condensation of Irma, Freud's wife and Irma's friend represents the fulfillment of a more deeply buried wish. Irma and Freud's wife are identified with each

other through the pains in their stomachs -- their pain is an appeal to Freud for healing.

However, the two women occupy structurally opposite positions. Irma, she argues, reaches out to Freud, opens her mouth to him:

she gives him a speech act that actively solicits him, asks something of him; she *addresses him with her desire* (for relief). . . But-- she refuses to take in the seed of his 'solution' and to be therapeutically fecundated by it. On the other hand, his wife takes in his seed, gives him a child, but, 'bashful in his presence,' she shies away from him, *she does not address him with her desire*. (Felman 108)

Freud's wish, Felman argues, is to substitute Irma for his wife and his wife for Irma. She writes, "from his wife, Freud wants precisely the solicitation, the demand with which Irma appeals to him, addresses him. From Irma he desires, on the other hand, the opening and the fecundity of the wife" (Felman 108). In the figure of Irma's friend, Felman sees the embodiment of this desire for exchange. As Freud's ideal patient, Irma's friend suggests that "the dream's wish seems to be to understand women's unconscious (to have it open up to him) and to create, with women, through this unprecedented mode of therapeutic (human) partnership, an unprecedented mode of human (sexual) discourse, and an unprecedented mode of human (analytic, and analytically procreative) intercourse" (Felman 109).

After concluding that Irma's friend would have 'opened her mouth properly,' Freud abruptly breaks off this part of the analysis, saying, "If I had pursued my comparison between the three women, it would have taken me far afield" (143). The so-called 'navel,' the center of the dream, is deliberately left mysterious. Erikson suggests:

This statement, in such intimate proximity to allusions concerning the resistance of Victorian ladies (including the dreamer's wife, now pregnant) to being undressed and examined, suggests an element of transference to the Dream Problem as such: the Dream, then, is just another haughty woman, wrapped in too many mystifying covers and 'putting on airs' like a Victorian lady. . . In the last analysis, then, the dream itself. . . is the one, as the Bible would say, to be 'known.' (Erikson 270)

The conflated identities of the four women are extended even further to include the personification of Dream itself. The desire to know -- in all senses of the word -- this personification of Dream is one of the wishes buried within the dream.

Felman connects the navel of the dream to an altogether different idea. Picking up Erikson's idea that Freud is pregnant with psychoanalysis, she notes that "The figure of the navel is itself curiously related to the the theme of pregnancy, both semantically (because of its metaphorical suggestiveness of the umbilical cord) and syntactically (because of its location in the text)" (Felman 112). She goes on to point out that the navel "marks, in other words, at once the *disconnection* and the *connection* between a maternal body giving birth and a newborn child. The navel of the dream embodies, thus, the way in which the dream is, all at once, *tied up* with the unknown and *disconnected* from its knowledge" (Felman 113). The unknown, she suggests, is specifically feminine in character; it is "a *structured female knot* that cannot be untied. . . a knot, in other words, which points not to the identifiability of any given feminine identity but to the inexhaustibility, the unaccountability, of *female difference*" (Felman 115). She ultimately concludes her argument with the assertion that:

the female knot of pain in Irma's throat, which symbolizes at the same time Irma's pain and Irma's choking speech, embodies, thus, the very navel of the feminine complaint, and of the feminine complaint's resistance to interpretation: a knot that is at once the *nodal point* of the female pain and that which makes the nodal point of the female pain *unspeakable* . . . in terms of a male (self-conscious, self-identical) solution. (Felman 119)

For Felman, therefore, the question of female knowledge is intimately tied up with the problem of sexual difference; the one leads naturally, inevitably into the other.

## **Medical knowledge**

Freud operates in the Irma dream primarily as a doctor: he is challenged as a medical man and a man of science to find a solution for Irma's complaint. Irma's complaint, however, is mystifying and deeply unsettling. Freud retreats to the comfort of his professional circle, from the realm of female mystery to the world of male knowledge.

The interactions between the four doctors in the dream are one of the aspects that Freud pays the most attention to in his analysis, a sign both of its importance and his relative comfort with the subject. There is obviously a hierarchy in place among Dr. M., "the leading figure in our circle" (139), Freud himself, and the doctors Otto and Leopold, who are introduced by the dream as friends as well as colleagues. It is a hierarchy which Freud finds at once comforting and confining.

His relationship with Dr. M. in particular seems fraught with contradictions. He appeals to Dr. M. in both the dream and in waking life as a superior source of knowledge. Dr. M.'s explanation in the dream can be read as an attempt to offer comfort to Freud: "I was in need of an assurance that all would be well in the end, and it seemed to me that to have put the consolation into the mouth precisely of Dr. M. had not been a bad choice" (147). The dream reaches out for 'assurance' and 'consolation' to Dr. M., an authority figure whom Freud respects. Yet the consolation that Dr. M. offers is nonsensical. Freud suggests that he "was trying to make fun of Dr. M.'s fertility in producing far-fetched explanations and making unexpected pathological connections" (147). He goes on to conclude "this part of the dream was expressing derision at physicians who are ignorant of hysteria" (148). Even as he reaches out to Dr. M. for affirmation, the dream undercuts Dr. M's authority by making him appear foolish. Freud is

caught between conflicting needs to believe his assurance and to supplant his authority with his own superior knowledge of hysteria.

Erikson reads this part of the dream as a rite of conversion. The appeal to Dr. M. becomes an appeal to a higher authority, the four doctors form a community of belief, Freud's moment of identification with Irma is a symbolic sacrifice of his masculine identity and Dr. M.'s apparently nonsensical pronouncement produces a shared conviction about the causes of the problem (Erikson 260). This community of belief "restores to the dreamer a *belongingness* (brotherhood) to a hierarchic group *dominated by an authority* in whom *he believes implicitly*. . . he now has sanction for *driving the devil* into Dr. O. With the *righteous indignation* which is the believer's reward and weapon, he can now make '*an unclean one*' (a disbeliever) out of his erstwhile accuser" (Erikson 260-1). Erikson reinterprets the configuration of the scientific community as a congregation of religious belief. He labels this as the action of the ego in the dream, while the motives of revenge and replacement that Freud identified are categorized as the impulses of the id. The return to simple trust in authority is complicated by the desire to redefine and usurp that authority. Having constructed his own interpretation, Erikson nonetheless returns to Freud's interpretation as definitive; he concludes that:

[the dream's trust in Dr. M. was] a hypocritical attempt to hide the dream's true meaning, namely revenge on those who doubted the dreamer as a worker. . . The ego, by letting itself return to sources of security once available to the dreamer as a child, may help him dream well and to sustain sleep, while promising revengeful comeback in a new day, when 'divine mistrust' will lead to further discoveries. (Erikson 263)

Erikson imagines the community of belief as an attempt to rationalize and conceal the destructive impulses of the unconscious mind.

The action of the dream -- Erikson might say, the energy of the id -- transforms Freud's anxiety about his own responsibility for Irma's continued pains into an attack on Otto, who



thoughtlessly gives Irma a dangerous injection with a dirty needle in the dream. In the analysis, Freud writes, “Here an accusation of thoughtlessness was being made directly against my friend Otto. I seemed to remember thinking something of the same kind that afternoon when his words and looks had appeared to show that he was siding against me. It had been some such notion as: ‘How easily his thoughts are influenced! How thoughtlessly he jumps to conclusions!’” (150). Freud clearly feels persecuted and accused by the rebuke implied in the news Otto brings of Irma’s continued illness. Otto’s role in the dream can be read as a response to this perceived attack. The dream turns Otto’s accusation of carelessness back upon himself: this time it is not Freud who has erred, but Otto who has jumped to conclusions and responded inadequately. Freud concludes, “Otto had in fact annoyed me by his remarks about Irma’s incomplete cure, and the dream gave me my revenge by throwing the reproach back on to him” (151). The reversed accusation becomes a kind of revenge against Otto for his lack of faith in Freud.

The analysis does not rest here, however. Freud goes on to say:

Not only did I revenge myself on Otto for being too hasty in taking sides against me by representing him as being too hasty in his medical treatment (in giving the injection); but I also revenged myself on him for giving me the bad liqueur which had an aroma of fusel oil. And in the dream I found an expression which united the two reproaches: the injection was of a preparation of propyl. (152)

The injection refers not just to Otto’s hasty condemnation of Freud, but also to the gift of offensive liqueur. Freud takes the opportunity to point out a gaffe by his younger, unmarried colleague: “This liqueur gave off such a strong smell of fusel oil that I refused to touch it. My wife suggested our giving the bottle to the servants, but I -- with even greater prudence -- vetoed the suggestion, adding in a philanthropic spirit that there was no need for *them* to be poisoned either” (149). In contrast to Otto’s bachelor status, Freud emphasizes his position as a husband and the head of a household -- establishing himself as Otto’s superior. Otto’s gift is described by

Freud as ‘poison’ and the injection he gives to Irma in the dream is *poisonous*. Irma’s continued pains are, in the dream, a result of the attempts to heal her pain. The solution meant to cure her causes greater harm instead. All of this concern about poisonous solutions points to a deep anxiety about the solution that Freud himself is offering, the solution that Irma refuses to accept.

Though he ultimately dismisses it as camouflage by the ego, Erikson introduces a useful idea when he re-imagines the scientific community as a community of belief. Freud may be engaged in rebelling against and deriding the old forms of authority -- the nonsense spouted by Dr. M. -- but he is also engaged in creating a new kind of authority. If the scientific community is re-imagined as a community of belief, the science of psychoanalysis moves into the place formerly reserved for religion -- grappling with the unknown. The Irma dream imagines a world where Otto’s doubt will be answered and Dr. M’s knowledge will be revised; a world where Freud will gaze into the cavern of sexual difference, will understand the mystery of female knowledge. Yet he is still plagued by doubt. The vision of this dream-world is at once deeply attractive and profoundly terrifying; having dared to envision a new order of scientific thought, Freud is critically anxious that his solution should prove true.

## II.

A close examination of some of the dreams that Freud analyzes later in *The Interpretation of Dreams* offer a fresh perspective on the role the Irma dream plays in the establishment of psychoanalysis and Freud’s own struggles to write his book of dreams. Of particular interest are Freud’s dreams of self-dissection and of the botanical monograph, both of which shed light upon Freud’s conception of his project of dream analysis.

## Dissecting the self

The dream of self-dissection begins with a moment of curious duality where Freud is the doctor performing a dissection upon his own pelvis. It then jumps to a madcap journey in a cab and then to an Alpine trek before concluding in a wooden hut overlooking a deep chasm. Freud's analysis is primarily focused on the oddity of affect that the dream produces; Ronald Thomas points out that "Despite all the very suggestive erotic material in the manifest content of the dream, Freud finds the strangeness of the dreaming primary here" (Thomas 38). But the disparate aspects of the dream -- the self-dissection, the journey and the grave imagery at the end -- are highly suggestive of Freud's anxiety about the process and implications of writing *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

The physical self-dissection symbolically suggests the psychic self-dissection Freud practices in his project of interpreting dreams. He writes, "The task which was imposed on me in the dream of carrying out a dissection *of my own body* was thus my *self-analysis* which was linked up with my giving an account of my dreams" (491). On the surface it is curious that Freud should be dissecting his pelvis; the head and brain would seem to be more obvious correlates with the project of interpreting dreams. The pelvis, however, is obviously associated with sexuality, the factor which Freud refers to, in connection with the Irma dream, as "the factor to which I attributed the greatest importance in the origin of the nervous disorders which it was my aim to cure" (148). Just as Freud was staring into the depths of the feminine when he was confronted by Irma's open mouth, in this dream he deliberately sets out to take apart and examine his own identity as a male sexual being. The dissection is both an affirmation and a negation of Freud's masculine identity. He is examining himself as a male sexual being, but he is also symbolically castrating himself -- becoming the female other.

The curious journey that Freud embarks upon in the course of the dream recalls to his mind a pair of novels. As he says, “numerous elements of the dream were derived from these two imaginative novels” (491). In the mind of Freud’s reader, however, the journey and Freud’s description of the two novels recall nothing so much as Freud’s own journey in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. He writes in the analysis, “In both novels the guide is a woman; both are concerned with perilous journeys; while *She* describes an adventurous road that had scarcely ever been trodden before, leading into an undiscovered region” (491). The undiscovered region recalls the unconscious and the adventurous road could easily be Freud’s own process of dream interpretation; the perilous journey suggests the self-analysis in which he is engaged -- he had reflected only a few lines before upon “the amount of self-discipline it was costing me to offer the public even my book upon dreams -- I should have to give away so much of my own private character in it” (490). Who, then, is the female guide? The self-dissection dream itself offers Louise N., who has been pressuring Freud to finish his book on dreams. Considering the whole of that book, however, other candidates emerge; perhaps first among them is Irma, the key figure in the specimen dream that gave Freud his first major insight into the interpretation of dreams. Symbolically, at least, Irma and the collective of women she comes to represent have guided Freud into the depths of the unconscious and helped him begin to develop the tools to deal with what he finds there.

The dream ends with the apparently contradictory elements of the grave and the sleeping children. The hut on the edge of the abyss becomes an image of mortality: “The ‘wooden house’ was also, no doubt, a coffin, that is to say, the grave” (491). Freud symbolically confronts his own mortality, but his work is still unfinished, the abyss is still uncrossed. It is at this point that the children sleeping in the hut become significant. “What was going to make the crossing

possible,” he writes, “was not the boards but the children” (490). His tools have proved inadequate, the dream seems to say, but there is still hope for the future. In yet another reference to the novels, he muses, “children may perhaps achieve what their father has failed to” (492). Issues of creation and procreation seem to be connected in Freud’s mind; the Irma dream is haunted by Freud’s wife’s significant pregnancy and his own ‘conception’ of psychoanalysis is presented as a kind of intellectual pregnancy. The sleeping children may indeed be Freud’s own, waiting to continue his work -- ironically enough, Freud’s wife was pregnant at the time of the Irma dream with Anna Freud, the daughter who would in fact take up her father’s work. However, the sleeping children may also represent the child of his mind, psychoanalysis, designed to cross the abyss into the unknown.

Freud dwells at length in the analysis on the dream’s affect, conveyed in a few words at the end of his summary: “I woke in a mental fright” (490). He concludes that it is a reaction to finding himself confronted by the grave, despite the nobility of his final resting place. He writes, “a dream can turn into its opposite the *idea* accompanying an affect but not always the affect itself” (492). The idea of the grave is transformed into the glory of a noble resting place, but the fear of mortality remains. His work is still unfinished, the glorious tomb unearned -- the child psychoanalysis is still sleeping. Yet finishing his book causes its own level of anxiety; he reveals later that its publication was “a process which had been so distressing to me in reality that I had postponed the printing of the finished manuscript for more than a year” (515). He is caught between the terror of the tomb and the pain of self-dissection and must somehow find the strength to cross the abyss.

## Writing the dream book

The summary that Freud provides of the dream of the botanical monograph is surprisingly short, especially considering how much information he finds buried within it. He describes the dream in this way: “I had written a monograph on a certain plant. The book lay before me and I was at the moment turning over a folded coloured plate. Bound up in each copy there was a dried specimen of the plant, as though it had been taken from a herbarium” (202). Unlike the Irma dream and the dream of self-dissection, this dream is explicitly about a book -- though not the book Freud is presently writing. Yet, many of the ideas that come up in the analysis are related to Freud’s anxiety about the book that he is writing and the work in which he is engaged.

The monograph with its colored plates reminds Freud of a number of books from his past. Its similarity to a herbarium reminds him of an experience cleaning the herbariums at his high school: “Our headmaster once called together the boys from the higher forms and handed over the school’s herbarium to them to be looked through and cleaned. Some small worms -- bookworms -- had found their way into it. He does not seem to have had much confidence in my helpfulness, for he handed me only a few sheets” (204). Freud pictures himself as engaged in a work of recovery, preserving the integrity of the book against invaders and contaminants. He is occupied with a process of examination and cleansing. Yet he is still haunted by the doubts of others, by the headmaster’s lack of confidence in him.

Latent in the text of the analysis is the anxiety that Freud himself has become a bookworm, an invader and contaminant. The colored plates of the monograph recall an incident from his youth when he and his sister pulled a book to pieces: “It had once amused my father to hand over a book with *coloured plates* (an account of a journey through Persia) for me and my

eldest sister to destroy. . . I had been five years old at the time and my sister not yet three . . . the two of us blissfully pull[ed] the book to pieces (leaf by leaf. . .)” (205). Given a book they are too young to appreciate, the children are delightedly destructive. They pull the book to pieces without any real idea of what they are destroying. This memory, he concludes, is a screen memory for his later collection of monographs: “When I was seventeen I had run up a largish account at the bookseller’s and had nothing to meet it with; and my father had scarcely taken it as an excuse that my inclinations might have chosen a worse outlet” (205). Once again, his relationship with books and reading is marked by careless and destructive behavior. He is not cleaning (preserving) the book, he is pulling it apart. It is in this context that he remarks, “I had become a *bookworm*” (205)-- he is, paradoxically, the very parasite that he labors to remove; his love of books results only in destruction.

Freud admits that he was “enthralled by the *coloured plates*” that illustrate monographs (205). The colored plates that he so admires are in sharp contrast to the illustrations of his own first papers, which he draws himself: “When I myself had begun to publish papers, I had been obliged to make my own drawings to illustrate them and I remembered that one of them had been so wretched that a friendly colleague had jeered at me over it” (205). Freud is embarrassed by his own crude sketches: he fears that his modest efforts will leave him open to ridicule by his colleagues. Worse, his scratchings appear primitive compared to the brightly colored reality he is attempting to capture. If the books recalled by the dream are echoes of Freud’s own book, then he locates himself in an ambiguous middle ground between recovery and destruction, apparently uncertain about what sort of work he is engaged in. He lacks confidence in his own ability to clearly illustrate his ideas and worries that his work might appear crude and awkward

next to the work of others, that his powers of illustration are inadequate compared to the complex, oddly attractive, nature of the dream.

Thomas offers an interpretation of this sequence that is far less fraught with insecurity. Specifically referencing the book that Freud and his sister pull apart, he writes:

The act of dream interpretation as it is performed here is paradigmatic of the whole of Freud's theory: the book destroyed is a book of colored plates that is replaced first by Freud's narrative of the dream thoughts behind that action, and then by the book of his own authorship which contains that narrative. The puzzling 'pictographic' images of the dreamwork are replaced and mastered by the interpretive language of dream synthesis and then placed into the larger narrative of the 'life story' of the dreamer. (Thomas 29)

As the pictures become words, and then become text, they are locked into a definitive interpretation, deprived of their mystery. But in its own way, language can be just as mysterious as any dream. A text enshrines ambiguity and suggests new questions even as it answers others. This is the work in which Freud is engaged: transforming the sensual images generated by the mind into language, which can then be analyzed and categorized. Irma's open mouth, the pain in his own shoulder -- he at once captures and limits their meaning. (The trimethylamin is a sense experience, but it is also already language, the language of scientific symbol). His own scratchings may be crude, but they somehow have the power to capture and convey the mystery of dreams.

Purely on the level of sense experience -- and incidentally, connected through Fleiss to the vision of trimethylamin -- Freud sees the monograph lying before him; he cannot, however, extrapolate from that vision the image of *The Interpretation of Dreams* lying before him. He writes, "I had had a letter from my friend [Fleiss] in Berlin the day before in which he had shown his power of visualization: 'I am very much occupied with your dream-book. *I see it lying before me and I see myself turning over its pages.*' How much I envied him his gift as a seer! If only *I* could have seen it lying finished before me!" (204-5). Plagued by self-doubt, uncertain of



his project and of his own ability to complete it, Freud envies Fleiss his confidence, his ability to look ahead to a successful future. The letter comes to Freud bearing within it the image of Freud's dream book; it is the mirror of another letter, from Freud to Fleiss, where Freud is the one with a visionary ability. In this letter, Freud visualizes a marble tablet that might one day adorn the house where he dreamed the Irma dream, a tablet that would read, "In this house, on July 24th, 1895 the Secret of Dreams was revealed to Dr. Sigmund Freud" (154 fn.1). Writing, particularly the private writing of correspondence, becomes the safe space where dreams can be vocalized and confirmed. It is only in the public act of writing, however, only in the actual production of the dream book that these dreams can be fulfilled -- there will be no plaque to immortalize the dreaming of the Irma dream if Freud does not overcome his fears of his own inadequacy and send *The Interpretation of Dreams* out into the world.

### III.

Who is the Freud of the Irma dream? There are many ways to read Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams*; just as Freud brought his own agenda to the writing of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, so readers bring their own agendas to the reading of Freud -- their own preconceptions, preoccupations, interests and desires. The text remains the same, but every reader finds his or her own version of Freud within it.

#### **The man of science**

Erik Erikson, one of the most prominent figures in the early history of psychology, offers an alternative interpretation of the Irma dream, focusing, as Freud could not, on the dream's location in the context of Freud's life. Erikson is deeply concerned with the dream's relationship

to the origins of psychoanalysis. He interprets the ideas of pregnancy that haunt the dream as a sign that Freud wishes to conceive, to be impregnated with, psychoanalysis through his intellectual exchange with Fleiss. In discussing this idea, he writes:

every act of creation, at one stage, implies the unconscious fantasy of inspiration by a fertilizing agent of a more or less deified, more or less personified mind or spirit. This 'feminine' aspect of creation causes tumultuous confusion not only because of man's intrinsic abhorrence of femininity but also because of the conflict (in really gifted individuals) of this feminine fantasy with an equally strong 'masculine' endowment which is to give a new and original form to that which has been conceived and carried to fruition. (272-3)

Erikson sets up an opposition between 'masculine' and 'feminine' aspects in the mind of genius; he acknowledges, however, a certain discomfort with the feminine aspect, referring to "man's intrinsic abhorrence of femininity." Erikson has postulated a method of (intellectual) conception where women are no longer required, but the fact that this requires a man to assume a 'feminine' role is deeply troubling for him -- as Freud's identification with the female Irma is troubling for Freud.

The emphasis on Freud's relationship with Fleiss and the re-imagining of the male scientific circle as a community of belief reveals Erikson's preoccupation with Freud's relationships to his colleagues. The scientific community is imagined as the source of knowledge and authority, despite Freud's ambiguous relationship to it in the dream. The idea of conceiving psychoanalysis with Fleiss reinforces the idea that communication between men -- theoretical exchanges, intellectual debates -- is the source of profound insight and creativity. Erikson is, of course, positioned precisely in this male scientific community; he is himself Freud's colleague, or more properly, one of his successors. The claims that he makes about the scientific community are claims about his own relationship to Freud.

This preoccupation is even more obvious when he analyzes the dream in the light of his own theory about stages of life (261-3). He concludes that the Irma dream arises out of a crisis of middle age: “It deals most of all with matters of *Generativity*, although it extends into the neighboring problems of Intimacy and of Integrity. . . The doctor’s growing sense of harboring a discovery apt to *generate new thought* (at a time when his wife harbored an addition to the *younger generation*) had been challenged the night before by the impact of a doubting word on his tired mind” (263). Erikson offers an interesting alternate view of the Irma dream. He reinterprets Freud’s dream -- and Freud himself -- in terms of his own theory. Freud is re-imagined, re-created from a new perspective.

Erikson’s reading of the Irma dream is no less insightful for the fact that it is colored by his own agenda. Freud is reinterpreted in terms of Erikson’s own theory, in terms of his relationship to Freud and in terms of his own discomfort about sexual identity. Erikson’s picture of Freud is a picture of Erikson as well as Freud.

### **The feminist perspective**

Shoshana Felman deliberately makes an effort to reveal the preconceptions and personal agendas that shape her reading of Freud. She situates herself between feminist critics who attack Freud for his blindspots and overenthusiastic admirers who insist that Freud is beyond reproach. She imagines Freud’s approach to femininity in this way:

For [Freud], psychoanalysis was not so much an answer (the answers were provisional), as the constant and unfinished struggle to articulate -- to open up -- a question; a question whose revolutionary implications I believe neither women nor psychoanalysis has as yet measured; a question that he was the first to ask, the first not to take for granted: ‘What does a woman want?’ (72-3)

Felman explicitly rejects the vision of a Freud who attempts to provide answers, and more than this, to impose his answers on the world. In her view, Freud becomes an almost heroic figure in the history of Western thought: asking questions that had never been asked before, perhaps even taking tentative steps toward the feminist movement.

Felman also identifies in Freud a desire to hear and address female suffering. She suggests that Irma's complaint is so disturbing because it is a complaint that he does not know how to answer; the wish embodied in the Irma dream might be this: "He does not simply want to overcome, to forcefully *reduce* female resistance and to stifle the complaint: he wants to *understand* it so that he can *answer* it appropriately, relieve the suffering. Freud's fundamental male wish is to *satisfy* each of these women" (107). Once again, Felman explicitly rejects a Freud that desires intellectual dominance. Rather, she attributes to him a desire to hear the suffering women and respond to them. Felman seems to be combatting one of the easiest misreadings of Freud: a reading that ignores the fact that psychoanalysis as Freud developed it is a discipline that is precisely concerned with listening and understanding. It is too easy to become preoccupied with Freud's apparent failures on the level of interpretation.

At the heart of Felman's argument is the idea that there are two Freuds, if not more. There is the conscious Freud, the waking Freud, who is deeply invested in the male scientific community and who is searching for a way to help his patients, to answer their complaints. But there is also the unconscious Freud, the dreaming Freud, who is capable of identifying with his female patients and who is unwilling to reduce femininity to a simple, easily comprehended theory. Felman sees these two Freuds as in conflict with each other: "the dream is *critical* of Freud's life attitudes: but critical in a creative way" (91). Freud's unconscious mind resists his attempts to restrain it in rigid patterns of understanding; it continually forces him to question

further, opening up new territory to be explored. Felman makes the argument that the mystery of the feminine is part of this new territory and that the dream identifies the knot of women -- Irma, Irma's friend, the governess, Freud's wife -- as appropriate guides and companions in its exploration.

In one sense, Felman falls into the trap of critics who are too eager to validate Freud. But it might be more appropriate to say that she narrowly avoids it, because the Freud that Felman sees is clearly present in the text. He is not the only Freud in the text, or all of the Freud in the text, but Felman addresses this too, in a way. She allows Freud to have an unconscious mind, to be plagued by blindspots and contradictions, to be in conflict with himself. Felman's Freud is not a villain but neither is he a hero; instead, he is a *genius*, unconsciously aware that the attempt to impose a solution is doomed to failure, though his waking mind attempts it nevertheless.

### **Writing the self**

The clearest vision of Freud's self in the text is, of course, Freud's own: the nature of the project Freud is engaged upon, the writing of dreams, requires that both his conscious and unconscious minds be present in the text. Sometimes this occurs to an extent that makes him uncomfortable. Freud is a profoundly self-conscious writer, continually aware of his relationship with his audience. He is very conscious both of whom his audience is and what he wants them to see.

Freud deliberately and repeatedly presents the Irma dream as a dream about conscientiousness. This can in a sense be considered a defensive guise. Focusing on his concern for conscientiousness makes him appear to advantage as a medical man. More importantly, it draws attention away from questions of sexuality and identity; medical responsibility is

somehow safe and in keeping with his role as a doctor and a scientist. In both the dream and the analysis, the concern with conscientiousness appears in the wake of the dream's more disturbing moments -- the knot of women, the threatening identification with Irma. It seems to be Freud's way of returning to familiar ground after an uncomfortable encounter with the unknown.

Freud is also careful to set boundaries on his self-revelation: there are topics that he leaves undiscussed, places where he deliberately breaks off the analysis -- points that touch on topics that he must have seen as too revealing. The first comes at the highly significant portion of the analysis where he encounters the knot of women that Irma represents. Freud reveals in a footnote that "I had a feeling that the interpretation of this part of the dream was not carried far enough to make it possible to follow the whole of its concealed meaning" (143, fn. 2). He acknowledges that the interpretation is incomplete, that there is something more to be said -- that this is a boundary he is unwilling to cross. Again, he shies away from continuing with the analysis when discussing the way that female patients are examined through their clothes, this time declaring within the text itself, "Frankly, I had no desire to penetrate more deeply at this point" (146). This moment occurs just after Freud's extraordinary revelation that he could feel Irma's pain in his own body. The two points where Freud abruptly cuts off the analysis are related to questions of femininity and identification: he seems unwilling to confront the knot of the feminine or to explore more deeply the contrast between examining female patients through their clothes and being able to personally experience their pain. These are aspects of his unconscious mind that Freud himself seems uncomfortable with and he does his best to guard them from public scrutiny.

Freud reveals himself in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, but he reveals a carefully edited version of himself. He cannot, of course, conceal the workings of his unconscious mind

completely; this is, after all, a book about dreams. But he is not above engaging in a bit of authorial sleight of hand to divert attention from the parts of his unconscious mind that he finds too disturbing or too private to reveal. Freud's self-revelation is not complete: information is deliberately left out, other information is concealed in footnotes. The shadows of ideas that Freud cannot or will not deal with openly haunt the borders of the text.

## Part 2

### The Dora Case

The story of Freud's analysis of Ida Bauer, published in 1905 as *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* was written after Ida abruptly ended her analysis with Freud on the last day of 1900. Freud re-christened his patient 'Dora' and wrote the story of her treatment, examining both the causes of Dora's hysteria and the reasons that her analysis came to such an abrupt and (for Freud) unsatisfactory end.

The eighteen-year-old Dora is trapped by a conspiracy of silence between the adults in her life. Her father has engaged in a long-term affair with a woman that Freud calls Frau K. Her husband, Herr K, makes sexual advances on Dora on several occasions until she finally tells her parents, who fail to believe her. Freud initially believes that Dora is concealing her desire for Herr K, but he realizes too late that she is actually struggling with a desire for *Frau K*.

Dora leaves Freud tormented by the analysis he did not complete. In one sense, his writing of her story can be understood as an attempt to achieve some kind of resolution.

#### I.

Dora has lost her voice. She comes to Freud sporting a whole host of hysterical symptoms, the most persistent of which is a nervous cough and "a complete loss of voice" (15). More than this, she has lost her voice on a symbolic level as well: she is unable to tell her story because the people around her are unwilling to listen to and believe her. Dora's aphonia is in a sense the acting out on her body of the problems she is facing.



## Dora's voice

In the course of his analysis of Dora's case, Freud offers three explanations for the young woman's loss of voice. The first two are concerned with Herr K: her aphonia may be an adverse reaction to an unwanted embrace, or, on the contrary, it may be a sign that she wishes to speak to no one but Herr K. Freud relates an experience when Herr K surprised her in a doorway with a kiss, an embrace that she responded to with disgust. In light of this experience, Freud goes on to interpret her aphonia in this way: "during the man's passionate embrace she felt not merely his kiss upon her lips but also the pressure of his erect member against her body. This perception was revolting to her; it was dismissed from her memory, repressed, and replaced by the innocent sensation of pressure upon her thorax" (23). According to this explanation, a pressure against her body which made Dora uncomfortable was translated into an uncomfortable pressure in another part of her body, where it caused the cough and the loss of her voice.

The second explanation that Freud offers for Dora's loss of speech arose from the realization that the duration of her attacks was usually between three to six weeks, the same length as Herr K's business trips. Freud concludes, "Dora's aphonia, then, allowed of the following symbolic interpretation. When the person she loved was away she gave up speaking; speech had lost its value since she could not speak to *him* (33). In saying that Dora 'gave up' speaking, Freud implies that on some level this was a conscious choice, a deliberate sacrifice. There is also a peculiar assumption that the only *value* in speech is communication with a loved one.

The two explanations are rooted in very different attitudes towards Herr K. The first explanation implies that Dora is disgusted by Herr K, while the second depends upon her desire

for his presence. Freud intentionally allows these contradictory explanations to coexist, then goes on to muddy the waters even further.

In his final explanation for her vocal problems, Freud relates Dora's problem not to Herr K but to her father and especially to his affair with Frau K: "the conclusion was inevitable that with her spasmodic cough, which, as is usual, was referred for its exciting cause to a tickling in her throat, she pictured to herself a scene of sexual gratification *per os* between the two people whose love affair occupied her mind so incessantly" (41). Freud suggests that Dora is identifying with her father's mistress, with Frau K; he is not yet aware of the full implications of this identification, but this new explanation depends upon a combination of fascination and repugnance.

Freud insists that these three apparently conflicting explanations for Dora's vocal problems are all equally valid. He asserts that "Any one who takes up psychoanalytic work will quickly discover that a symptom has more than one meaning and serves to represent several unconscious mental processes simultaneously" (40). Freud is unwilling to limit the interpretation of Dora's symptoms; in fact, he seems to be justifying Felman's assertion that he is concerned not with reducing and defining information, but with exploring possibilities and opening up new perspectives. Later in the analysis, Freud compares his work to that of a writer, who "simplifies and abstracts when he appears in the character of a psychologist. But in the world of reality, which I am trying to depict here, a complication of motives, an accumulation and conjunction of mental activities -- in a word, overdetermination -- is the rule" (52). The role of the psychoanalyst as he envisions it is to reveal the complications and contradictions of reality, to show that the mind -- conscious and unconscious -- operates on many different levels

at once. Dora's highly significant aphonia allows Freud to open up reality, to show that differing explanations can somehow all be 'true.'

### **Dora's silence**

If it were to function as a literary symbol, a character's loss of the physical ability to speak would probably signify a different kind of inability to communicate. Dora, who has literally lost her voice, is also without a person in her immediate circle with whom she can share her problems. She is not close to her mother -- in fact, she seems utterly scornful toward her. She is close to her father, but when she tells him of Herr K's advances by the lake, he insists, "Dora's tale of the man's immoral suggestions is a phantasy that has forced its way into her mind" (19). Her father explicitly rejects Dora's confidence by refusing to believe her. For obvious reasons, she cannot talk to Herr K. And Frau K, who was her confidante and the person who supplied her with much of her illicit sexual knowledge, betrayed her confidence by revealing Dora's reading habits to her husband. Dora is symbolically gagged: there is no one to listen to her, and when she tries to make them listen, they do not believe. Once the analysis begins, she is able to talk to Freud, but he too fails her by not recognizing her true feelings for Frau K. Dora's voice is lost, or perhaps has been taken away: there is no one to listen to the story she has to tell.

The situation is complicated, however, by Dora's apparent reluctance to tell her story. There are times when she seems to deliberately choose silence; Freud points out several occasions that Dora has kept secrets. Concerning Herr K's kiss in the doorway, he notes, "Neither of them ever mentioned the little scene; and according to her account Dora kept it a secret till her confession during the treatment" (21). In reference to the same incident, he goes

on to say that “After the scene of the kiss, she refused to join the party, without giving any reason” (21). And following the confrontation with Herr K. by the lake, he relates that “It was not until some days later that she had thrown any light upon her strange behavior” (19). Dora has a history of remaining silent about traumatic events. In a sense, she makes herself complicit in the silence that surrounds her: she too keeps silent, she too maintains a facade. Once in treatment, however, she makes a ‘confession’ -- and Freud becomes the keeper of Dora’s secrets.

### **Dora’s questions**

Freud initiates the discussion of Dora’s second dream by relaying that “For some time Dora herself had been raising a number of questions about the connection between some of her actions and the motives which presumably underlay them” (86). This act of asking questions, which previously had been Freud’s particular role as the analyst, seems to be a sign that Dora is finally taking a more active role in her own analysis. Dora has begun to explore her own motivations, to direct her critical insight towards herself instead of others.

Freud relays two particular questions that Dora asked. The first was “‘Why did I say nothing about the scene by the lake for some days after it had happened?’ Her second question was: ‘Why did I then suddenly tell my parents about it?’” (86-7). Both of these questions have to do with the problem of speaking vs. keeping silent. The first deals with her symbolic loss of voice and the second with her recovery of it. Dora is beginning to be aware of and to explore the reasons behind her silence and her movement towards self-revelation, of the way that she uses silence as a defense and speech as a weapon. Freud, in a strange moment of blindness, apparently fails to see the significance of these questions. Instead, he suggests that taking her parents into her confidence was an expression of a “morbid craving for revenge” and goes on to

suggest, “A normal girl, I am inclined to think, will deal with a situation of this kind by herself” (87). Here, Freud not only makes a judgement about what is ‘normal’; he also identifies normality with silence and a lack of social support. It immediately raises the question of what could be going on in Freud that would cause him to respond in this way. It seems almost defensive: in discomfort because of the questions Dora is asking, he turns around and accuses Dora of seeking revenge. Perhaps she was seeking revenge, but simplifying her motives in this way seems out of keeping with Freud’s own insistence that actions arise from a multiplicity of motives.

Dora has one final question for Freud: “She opened the third sitting with these words: ‘Do you know that I am here for the last time to-day?’” (96). Once again, Dora has taken on Freud’s role by expressing her decision through a question rather than a declaration. Moreover she attacks Freud on his own ground -- ‘Do you know?’ -- challenging his role as the analyst, the one who knows and interprets. Her decision to stop the sessions is one of the relatively few occasions in the case study where Freud finds it necessary to relay Dora’s own words: she has succeeded, if only momentarily, in silencing Freud. She leaves him haunted by a question -- ‘Do you know?’ -- which inspires the writing of the case history, in an attempt to make sense of Dora’s decision to end the treatment.

## II.

Silent and insecure in the world of the spoken word, Dora is much more at home in the world of writing and text. However, this world too has its particular dangers. Reading and writing are formulated as both a defense and a weapon, a source of knowledge that at once strengthens Dora and makes her vulnerable. The tools of knowledge are redefined as a means of

asserting power: what is known, what should be known, and what is deliberately not known all influence the ways that Dora -- and Freud -- position themselves in relation to others.

## Letters

For Dora, letters are a way to exercise power. Freud refers to “the farewell letter which she had written to her parents or had at least composed for their benefit. This letter had been intended to give her father a fright, so that he should give up Frau K.” (89). By exploiting her father’s emotional reactions, Dora hopes to gain some kind of control over his actions. The letter becomes an instrument of Dora’s bid for power, an attempt (like her hysteria?) to assume some kind of control over those around her. Freud makes an interesting distinction between whether the letter was ‘written to her parents’ or ‘composed for their benefit.’ The phrase ‘written to her parents’ implies a kind of sincerity, suggesting that on some level Dora may have taken the notion of suicide seriously. However, ‘composed for their benefit’ is more clearly manipulative: in this formulation, Dora’s actions are *merely* a bid for power, an attempt at manipulation. In one interpretation, the letter is a plea for help; in the other, it is both a reproach and a weapon.

Freud believes that Dora attempted to use another letter to gain power over him. He relates this story about the beginning of a session:

As I came into the room in which she was waiting she hurriedly concealed a letter which she was reading. I naturally asked her whom the letter was from, and at first she refused to tell me. Something then came out which was a matter of complete indifference and had no relation to the treatment. It was a letter from her grandmother, in which she begged Dora to write to her more often. I believe that Dora only wanted to play ‘secrets’ with me, and to hint that she was on the point of allowing her secret to be torn from her by the physician. (70)

In Freud’s view, this event is concerned entirely with Dora’s struggle with him for power. Dora has knowledge about the letter, and she shows her power, her autonomy, by withholding that

knowledge from Freud. Freud interprets this reluctance as a challenge, a sign that he is close to unraveling Dora's secrets -- gaining complete power over her -- and now he has only to persevere.

However, Freud is entirely unwilling to attribute any more importance to the exchange over the letter from Dora's grandmother. He sees a simple request for more communication as insignificant and unconnected to Dora's problems. But so many of Dora's problems are connected to her inability to communicate -- with others concerning the advances of Herr K, within her family about her father's relationship with Frau K, even within herself -- that her grandmother's overture may have been more significant than Freud wants to admit.

The letter from her grandmother represents a nexus of female communication of which Dora is -- or should be -- a part. Dora's grandmother begs her to write more often, to take her proper place in the circle of female knowledge and communication. Freud is perpetually excluded from this circle of communication. Dora's grandmother's letter is an invitation to join this circle, but the invitation is not addressed to Freud. His willingness to disregard this communication may indicate a deep discomfort about the fact that there is a community of knowledge that he is not and cannot be a part of, a community that he simultaneously fears and wishes to understand.

### **The dangers of reading**

Dora's attempts to empower herself lead her again to the written word, seeking knowledge she cannot gain from other sources. Plagued by questions about sexuality, she turns to books as a source of information -- only to learn that reading can be a dangerous activity. When she accuses Herr K. of inappropriately approaching her, he retaliates by attacking her

sexual purity, claiming that no girl who reads what she does can be trusted in matters of sexuality. He tells her father, “he had heard from Frau K that she took no interest in anything but sexual matters, and that she used to read Mantegazza’s *Physiology of Love* and books of that sort in their house on the lake. It was most likely, he had added, that she had been over-excited by such reading and had merely ‘fancied’ the whole scene she had described” (19). Dora’s attempts to gather information are used against her. Because she is interested in sexual knowledge, not traditionally the province of women, she is accused of being obsessed with sex; apparently, knowledge of this kind could ‘over-excite’ her and lead her to lose touch with reality. Seeking knowledge about sex is seen as shameful, if not dangerous and abnormal.

To a certain extent, Dora herself seems to have absorbed these attitudes about sexual knowledge. When Freud and Dora discuss the encyclopedia that appears in Dora’s second dream, Freud suggests that her appendicitis was “inflicted as the result of a process of displacement, after another occasion of more guilty reading had become associated with this one; and the guilty occasion must lie concealed in her memory behind the contemporaneous innocent one” (94). Dora’s reading is characterized as ‘guilty’ and she ‘inflicts’ illness upon herself as punishment. According to the standards of the culture, women were not supposed to be interested in this kind of knowledge and so Dora buries her attempts to obtain it and, as Freud puts it, “punished herself for dipping into [the encyclopedia’s] pages” (94). Dora is trapped between her own desire for knowledge and the social dictate that this is knowledge that she should not have.

Sara van den Berg explores the idea that Dora’s reading is an attempt to come to terms with her own sexuality: “She reads in order to learn how to write her own body, yet the only books available to her are the moral and scientific textbooks of patriarchal sexuality that insist



her body is already written” (298). Her attempts are foiled by the rigid definitions and restrictions of a society concerned more with conforming to the norm than with her sexual identity. She is not given an opportunity to define herself; she is trapped in a culture that wishes both to define her and to keep her ignorant.

Freud enters into this conflict over the possession of knowledge, filling -- though he is unwilling to recognize it -- an older woman’s position in the circuit of feminine knowledge. He occupies the position that should be occupied by her mother (and that was briefly occupied by Frau K) and is willing to *explain* sexuality to Dora, to *tell* her what she needs to know. He writes, “There is no necessity for feeling any compunction at discussing the facts of normal or abnormal sexual life with [his patients]. With the exercise of a little caution all that is done is to translate into conscious ideas what was already known in the unconscious” (42). He engages, as no one else in her life is willing to, in a discussion about sexual knowledge with Dora, arguing that there is nothing shameful in discussing sexuality openly. Ultimately, however, Freud’s unwillingness to identify himself with Dora’s mother, with Frau K, with the two governesses, makes him unable to engage her in conversation in the way that she really needs.

### III.

In the course of telling Dora’s story, Freud tells his own as well: he is both author and character in the tale of her analysis. Freud’s presentation of Dora’s story is also in a very real sense a self-presentation. Unlike *The Interpretation of Dreams*, where Freud examines versions of himself conjured from his unconscious mind, in the Dora case he consciously presents himself in his professional capacity.

As he tells Dora's story, Freud casts himself in many different roles. Some roles he assumes by way of analogy; others are aspects of his principal role as a psychoanalyst. However, even in his deliberately self-conscious writing, elements of his unconscious seep through, especially in the roles he vigorously rejects. The roles that Freud is unable -- or unwilling -- to assume are among his most interesting.

### **The archaeologist**

One of the ways in which Freud presents himself is as a sort of archaeologist, recovering the fragments of a patient's past and piecing them together to tell a story. He writes:

I had no choice but to follow the example of those discoverers whose good fortune it is to bring to the light of day after their long burial the priceless though mutilated relics of antiquity. I have restored what is missing. . . but like a conscientious archaeologist I have not omitted to mention in each case where the authentic parts end and my constructions begin. (7)

The comparison to an archaeologist reveals that Freud envisions himself as a recoverer of lost treasure. Importantly, however, the relics that Freud recovers from the unconscious are 'mutilated.' They are mere fragments and Freud must discover a way to piece them together in a fashion that makes sense. He also stresses the fact that he is a *conscientious* archaeologist; he promises to faithfully maintain the lines between the patient's authentic memories and his own re-creations. When discussing the interpretation of one of Dora's dreams, he writes, "I believed that I could already clearly detect the elements of Dora's dream, which could be pieced together into an allusion to an event in childhood" (63). This, then, is the project of the archaeologist at work: he has found the fragments and must now work to piece them together. He seems supremely confident in his ability to do so:

When I set myself the task of bringing to light what human beings keep hidden within them, not by the compelling power of hypnosis, but by observing what they say and

what they show, I thought the task was a harder one than it really is. He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his finger-tips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore. And thus the task of making conscious the most hidden recesses of the mind is one which it is quite possible to accomplish. (69)

The language of excavation and discovery, speaking of 'bringing to light' that which is 'hidden' invokes a romantic vision of the archaeologist, an explorer venturing into the darkness of the past. He describes his method as one of observation, paying close attention to people's words and actions. The formulation 'eyes to see and ears to hear' recalls the language of the Bible, where those who have been given the power to see and hear are contrasted with those who remain blinded. Freud clearly places himself in the first group: to him, the secrets of the unconscious mind are revealed in a thousand different ways.

Toril Moi complicates the image of Freud as an archaeologist, however, by accusing the archaeologist of mishandling the relics:

Freud's attempts to posit himself as the neutral, scientific observer who is merely noting down his observations and reflections can no longer be accepted. The archaeologist must be suspected of having mutilated the relics he finds. We must remember that Freud's version of the case is colored not only by his own unconscious countertransference but also by the fact that he signally fails to notice the transference in Dora, and therefore systematically misinterprets her transference symptoms throughout the text. (188)

Moi calls into question Freud's role as a man of science, as a bold explorer or careful excavator. Freud's ability to piece together the fragments of Dora's story is significantly impaired by his own preconceptions and his failure to recognize his identification with Herr K. In other words, she accuses him of being the kind of archaeologist who breaks the fragments he discovers in order to make them fit together in the way he thinks they should.

## The writer

Freud uses the role of an archaeologist as an analogy for his work as a scientist, but he is also concerned with his identity as a writer. The role of the writer fits Freud in a rather peculiar way: even as he contrasts his work as a psychoanalyst with the work of a creative writer, he is engaged in the writing of Dora's story. Comparing himself to a novelist, Freud carefully delineates the demands of fiction and the demands of psychology:

I must now turn to consider a further complication, to which I should certainly give no space if I were a man of letters engaged upon the creation of a mental state like this for a short story, instead of being a medical man engaged upon its dissection. The element to which I must now allude can only serve to obscure and efface the outlines of the fine poetic conflict which we have been able to ascribe to Dora. This element would rightly fall a sacrifice to the censorship of a writer, for he, after all, simplifies and abstracts when he appears in the character of a psychologist. But in the world of reality, which I am trying to depict here, a complication of motives, an accumulation and conjunction of mental activities -- in a word, overdetermination -- is the rule. (52)

The writer of fiction, in other words, is engaged in an act of 'creation,' while the scientist is engaged in the work of 'dissection.' Freud explores the difference between creation and analysis, claiming that it is the business of a writer to simplify the psychological motives of his characters. He creates a contrast between the man of science, concerned with examining details, complications and contradictions, and the man of letters, concerned with abstraction, with a lack of subtlety and contradiction.

Steven Marcus suggests that Freud is being deliberately disingenuous here. He writes, "That hypothetical writer is nothing but a straw man; and when Freud in apparent contrast represents himself and his own activities he is truly representing how a genuine creative writer writes" (69). A genuine writer retains uncertainties and hints of ambiguity; Freud is revealed as a genuine writer precisely because of his unwillingness to simplify and abstract. Marcus'

language, however, raises the inevitable question of how much of the Dora analysis is 'creative writing' -- where are the lines between fiction and reality?

Marcus suggests that the line between fiction and reality is significantly blurred by the dual role of character and author that Freud plays in the Dora case. Marcus notes, "In this Ibsen-like drama, Freud is not only Ibsen, the creator and playwright; he is also and directly one of the characters in the action and in the end suffers in a way that is comparable to the suffering of the others" (65). Freud's authorial objectivity is compromised by the fact that he is also a character, that he can be affected by the events of his story and that he suffers during its course. Freud nevertheless locates himself definitively as a writer, shaping both himself and Dora for presentation to an audience.

### **The scientist**

Within the story of the Dora case, Freud occupies the role of scientist and physician. Marcus writes, "He also features prominently in the text in his capacity as a nineteenth-century man of science and as a representative Victorian critic -- employing the seriousness, energy, and commitment of the Victorian ethos to deliver itself from its own excesses" (82). Marcus identifies seriousness, energy and commitment as definitively Victorian traits; more importantly, Freud's conviction that knowledge is something that could be totally mastered was also characteristic of the nineteenth century. Freud's obsession with the incomplete nature of his text and the unresolved aspects of the case suggests that he saw reality as something that could be fully known. Marcus calls attention to some of the limitations and misdirections of this conviction:

He is dogmatically certain of what the normative sexual response in young and other females is, and asserts himself to that effect. At the same time, he is, in my judgement,

utterly uncertain about where Dora is, or was, developmentally. At one moment in the passage he calls her a 'girl,' at another a 'child' -- but in point of fact he treats her throughout as if this fourteen-, sixteen-, and eighteen-year-old adolescent had the capacities for sexual response of a grown woman. (78)

Freud is certain about knowledge -- certain that the truth exists and he can know it -- but he is unable to adjust this kind of absolute knowledge to Dora's lived experience. He bases his interpretations upon a version of truth that does not apply to her. Freud's belief in scientific truth puts him in danger of becoming inflexible.

Freud's pursuit of scientific truth also takes the shape of some kind of moral duty as a physician and a researcher. He says:

But in my opinion the physician has taken upon himself duties not only towards the individual patient but towards science as well; and his duties towards science mean ultimately nothing else than his duties towards the many other patients who are suffering or will some day suffer from the same disorder. Thus it becomes the physician's duty to publish what he believes he knows of the causes and structure of hysteria, and it becomes a disgraceful piece of cowardice on his part to neglect doing so, as long as he can avoid causing direct personal injury to the single patient concerned. (2)

The repetition of the language of obligation highlights the importance he places on this subject; he sees it as some kind of moral charge. He creates an ascending hierarchy of duty: duty to his patients, duty to science, duty to all patients suffering the same illness. Science becomes connected with honor and social responsibility; failing in this 'duty' becomes an example of cowardice. Conversely, Freud suggests that it is *heroic* for the scientist to fulfill his duty towards science -- the publication of his theories becomes an act of heroism.

### **The female other**

The role that Freud emphatically refuses to assume in the Dora case is the role of the female other. He allows himself to be blinded by countertransference; he identifies too strongly with Herr K and does not see that Dora is also identifying him with Frau K. Part of Freud's hurt

and anger when Dora decides to end the analysis stems from the fact that Dora is dismissing him like a governess -- like a servant and, worse, like a female servant. Hélène Cixous writes, "Freud in relation to Dora was in the maid's place. It is Freud who was the servant-girl, and that is what is intolerable for Freud in the Dora case -- that he was treated as one treats maids, having been fired the way you fire a servant-girl. There is no failure worse than that" (*La Jeune Née* 152). Freud fails Dora because he is unable to put himself in a woman's place, unable to perceive the true nature of Dora's feelings for Frau K. In retaliation, Dora places him in the one place he most does not wish to be: on the margins, in the role of a female servant.

#### IV.

In the end, Freud has the last word, because it is Freud who is left to tell Dora's story. In some ways, it might be more appropriate to say that Freud appropriates Dora's story and makes it his own. However, for all of his blindspots and failures, Freud makes a genuine effort to -- in that curious phrase -- 'do justice' to Dora's story.

#### **Plugging the gaps**

Toril Moi suggests that Freud has mishandled Dora's story by using it as an excuse to explore his own: "in his Prefatory Remarks Freud discloses that 'Dora's story' *is* largely 'Freud's story': he is the author, the one who has conjured a complete work from these analytic fragments" (187). The original fragments may have belonged to Dora, but the finished product is Freud's alone. Or, again, "We must assume that it is Freud himself who has imposed a fictional coherence on Dora's story" (186). This filling in of gaps, this restoring what was

missing, does not initially seem threatening, but Moi explores the disturbing aspects of the way that Freud exploits his position as author to make himself the central character.

The most serious danger that Moi sees in Freud's 'restorative' work is connected with his conception of knowledge. Moi argues, "Knowledge for Freud is a finished, closed whole. Possession of knowledge means possession of power" (194). Knowledge must necessarily be complete in order to be valuable and having this kind of complete knowledge puts one in a position of power. Moi identifies this concern with knowledge as one of the central anxieties of Freud's text: "Freud's text oscillates endlessly between his desire for complete insight or knowledge and an unconscious realization (or fear) of the fragmentary, deferring status of knowledge itself" (187). The incomplete nature of knowledge becomes something that is profoundly threatening for Freud, connected with sexual anxiety. Moi seizes upon one of Freud's most famous references and suggests, "He is the one who discloses and unlocks secrets; he is Oedipus solving the sphinx's riddle. But like Oedipus he is ravaged by a terrible anxiety: the fear of castration. If Freud cannot solve Dora's riddle, the unconscious punishment for this failure will be castration" (195). Moi portrays the possession of complete knowledge as connected with issues of sexual identity -- anything less than complete knowledge is emasculating. It is a man's role to be the possessor of knowledge, to wield the power of interpretation: "the male is the bearer of knowledge; he alone has the power to penetrate woman and text; woman's role is to let herself be penetrated by such truth" (198). The role of women, according to this formulation, is to be a purely passive one.

For Moi, there is an inherent contradiction in Freud's project of psychoanalysis. Dora's hysteria is interpreted as a sign of surrender: "Hysteria is, as Catherine Clement perceives, a cry for help when defeat becomes real, when the woman sees that she is efficiently gagged and



chained to her feminine role” (192). According to this interpretation, hysteria is the sign of despair, a woman’s acknowledgement that there is no way out, that she is trapped. The forces of society, family and environment have conspired to chain her in place. The hysteric is trapped in the purely passive role, as the subject to be known. It is to this image of woman in chains that Freud wishes to appear as a liberator: “Now if the hysterical woman is gagged and chained, Freud posits himself as her liberator. And if the emancipatory project of psychoanalysis fails in the case of Dora, it is because Freud the liberator happens also to be, objectively, on the side of oppression” (192). Freud, the bearer of knowledge and truth, comes to the despairing woman and offers her, through psychoanalysis, release from her chains. But the knowledge he has to offer is a male knowledge, obsessed with completion and coherence. He is unable to help Dora find the answers she seeks -- or ask the questions she needs to ask.

### **Writing reality**

Steven Marcus suggests that, for Freud, it is in and through the telling of stories that we come to terms with reality. He writes:

human life is, ideally, a connected and coherent story, with all the details in explanatory place, and with everything (or at least as close to everything as is practically possible) accounted for, in its proper causal or other sequence. Inversely, illness amounts at least in part to suffering from an incoherent story or an inadequate narrative account of oneself. (71)

From this perspective, Dora’s problems are rooted in the idea that “the three adults to whom she was closest, whom she loved the most in the world, were apparently conspiring -- separately, in tandem, or in concert -- to deny her the reality of her experience. They were conspiring to deny Dora her reality and reality itself” (61). If one’s experience of reality is to be understood as a story, then the people in Dora’s life are telling her that her story is *merely* a ‘story,’ a fantasy, not

a true narrative. Psychoanalysis is only successful when “one has come into possession of one’s own story. It is a final act of self-appropriation, the appropriation by oneself of one’s own history” (71-2). It is a success that Dora never attains, but for Freud, the very act of writing Dora’s story becomes an effort to come to terms with an analysis that failed:

We begin to sense that it is his story that is being written and not hers that is being retold. Instead of letting Dora appropriate her own story, Freud became the appropriator of it. . . It may be that this was an inevitable development, that is is one of the typical outcomes of an analysis that fails, that Dora was under any circumstances unable to become the appropriator of her own history, the teller of her own story. (85)

The pen is Freud’s, the voice is Freud’s and, ultimately, the story is Freud’s. Dora is unable to possess her own story, but Freud is compelled to do his best to piece it together.

### **Putting the pieces together**

Freud’s activity in telling Dora’s story is not so very different from the activity that critics like Moi, Marcus, Felman and Erikson engage in when they approach Freud. He unearths fragments of Dora’s story and tries to fit them into a coherent whole, tries to put them together in a meaningful way. He offers an *interpretation* of Dora’s story, just as others attempt to produce a meaningful interpretation of Freud. Perhaps Freud’s reconstruction of Dora’s story is not entirely successful: he is too often blinded by his own preoccupations. However, his method is a paradigm for interpretive work of any kind.

## Part 3

### Hélène Cixous' *Portrait de Dora*

In February 1975, the Petit Orsay theater in Paris presented *Portrait de Dora*, a play by Hélène Cixous. The play was a dramatic reinterpretation of the Dora case. Cixous had in fact written about Dora before: the case figures in her 1973 novel, *Le Portrait du Soleil* and in the book that she wrote with Catherine Clément in 1975, *La Jeune Née*. Cixous' work is an example of the enduring fascination feminist writers have had with Freud's Dora.

In *La Jeune Née*, Cixous describes her attraction to the figure of Dora: "Dora seemed to me to be the one who resists the system, the one who cannot stand that the family and society are founded on the body of women, on bodies despised, rejected, bodies that are humiliating once they have been used. And this girl -- like all hysterics, deprived of the possibility of saying directly what she perceived. . . still had the strength to make it known" (154). The play that she wrote, *Portrait de Dora*, focuses the attention clearly on Dora, on her rejection of the social system, her criticism of social values and her strength in making her (ultimately futile) rebellion known. Morag Shiach claims that "Cixous's aim in this play is to dramatize the energies and forces that lie behind Dora's hysteria, and to relate them to the circuits of exchange and desire so tantalizingly sketched out by Freud. Her aim is not to provide 'the truth' about Dora, or even to offer Dora as a feminist heroine, but rather to open out the network of relations in which Dora is caught, and to assess the disruptive potential of Dora's refusal to assent to their reproduction" (112-3). However, in order to draw out the figure of Dora from Freud's text, Cixous must also come to terms with the looming figure of Freud himself.

Cixous encounters Freud in at least seven distinct roles: he is the author of the source text and a character in his own text; he is a character in her play and an audience for the interactions of the other characters; he is the narrator of the play and even in a certain sense its director; and he is an institution: Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis. Part of Cixous' struggle in creating *Portrait de Dora* is coming to terms with all of these Freuds. She ultimately strikes an elegant balance between showing the Freud who failed Dora even though he wanted to help her, and paying homage to Freud for his insistence on the importance of the personal narrative and subjective experience, though she does not forget that Freud often failed at this too.

### **Staging Freud**

The play begins with Freud "seated, seen from behind" (2). In other words, he is situated in an ironic reversal of the analytic set-up. The audience occupies the analyst's role in relation to Freud. However, he is also oriented in the same direction as the audience; like the audience he sits and faces the action on the stage and like the audience he will observe and pass judgement on the actions of the characters. Cixous immediately highlights the ambiguous position that Freud occupies in her play: he is simultaneously both character and critic. He shares the audience's perspective, but he is also presented to the audience for interpretation. The physical staging of the play further emphasizes Freud's curious dual role: "The stage itself in *Portrait de Dora* is divided into sections that delineate a specific character's spatial home. . . Freud never leaves his chair except to watch the other characters" (Penrod 138). Freud is isolated from the other characters. He occupies a space in Dora's life that is quite distinct and he interacts with the others only in the role of an observer.

Freud is also given the first words of the play; he begins the action with a theoretical discourse that Dora interrupts with a violent plea. But Freud continues to narrate the action of the play, often appearing in the stage directions as the 'Voice of the Play.' Many of these passages contain deliberate echoes of the Dora case history, if they are not direct quotations. Cixous dramatizes for her audience the many levels on which she must engage Freud in the course of her project: he interacts with Dora as a character, observes the other characters as an analyst, narrates the action of the play as the narrator and author of the source text.

Throughout the play, Freud interacts directly only with Dora. Towards all the other characters, he is merely a spectator. However, in the course of the play, his position transforms from an impartial observer who affirms Dora's point of view to another character with whom Dora is in conflict. When Dora's father doubts her version of the scene by the lake, she appeals to Freud for confirmation of her point of view:

HERR B: She probably 'fancied' the whole scene by the lake.

DORA: Do you hear him?

FREUD: Yes. (3-4)

Freud affirms Dora's version of events and reassures her that her point of view is valid. He acts as a sort of witness for Dora and positions himself on Dora's side against her father and the Ks. Yet as the dramatized analysis progresses, Freud becomes more dictatorial and Dora becomes more resistant to his interpretations:

FREUD: Fire is the opposite of water: in the dream where there is fire, there is water. You surely 'needed to leave' because of fire. But also to avoid a little mishap. . . Besides, fire ignites, it can perfectly well represent love. Thus, from fire there is a path, which leads. . .

DORA: I hear you coming!

FREUD: You don't know how right you are! You hear me coming. There where another has already been, a long time ago, a very long time ago.

DORA: Don't you think you're interpreting all that a bit too subjectively? (18)

Rather than listening to Dora's account of her experience or allowing her to make her own associations, Freud attempts to force Dora's dream into the model of his own theory of dream interpretation. Dora is unwilling to allow him to commandeer her dream; she rightly points out that Freud has been interpreting the dream from his perspective rather than hers. No longer Dora's impartial witness, Freud is beginning to insert himself into the analysis, to put himself into the role filled in the past by her father or Herr K. Cixous is dramatizing the countertransference that would ultimately cause Dora's treatment to fail. Dora is already resistant to Freud's attempts to interject himself, a resistance that will eventually lead her to flee completely.

Dora begins to feel increasingly threatened as Freud assumes control of the analysis and moves to the offensive; she starts to use Freud's own tactics against him:

FREUD: You get dressed quickly: to hide the secret.

DORA: But I never said anything of the kind.

FREUD: He whose lips are silent. . .

DORA: Yes, yes, I know. And he who chatters with his fingertips? Why do you spin your pen seven times in your hand before speaking? Why?

FREUD: We must respect the rules!

DORA: (she mimics him) 'We must respect the rules.' (19)

Dora protests the words that Freud is putting in her mouth -- an attempt to regain control of her own story. At this point, Freud does not seem to be interested any longer in listening to and affirming Dora's version of events; rather, he is collecting details and *retelling* her story. To her narration he adds details and ascribes motivations. Rather than helping her to interpret her own memories, he seeks to interpret them for her. When her protest is ignored, Dora turns the same tactic that Freud uses to quell her against him. She recasts herself in the role of analyst and Freud in the role of analysand. Threatened by this sudden reversal of roles, Freud appeals to the 'rules' of psychoanalysis for defense, the implicit rules that clearly define the respective roles of

analyst and analysand. Increasingly disillusioned with Freud and with the psychoanalytic process, Dora mocks those rules -- they no longer have any authority for her, or perhaps they represent an authority she wishes to rebel against.

Dora's behavior becomes increasingly provocative as the analysis continues and Freud needs more than just the rules of psychoanalysis to subdue her. When Dora begins to act coy and flirtatious, Freud is forced to fall back on his personal *gravitas* to quash her:

DORA: Why are you looking at me that way? Persistently?

FREUD: I'm not looking at you persistently.

DORA: Why not?

FREUD: No, no. None of this. You know I'm an institution. (22-3)

In the written text of the play, there is no way to determine whether or not Freud is actually looking at Dora in a peculiar way, although it could become an interesting moment in an actor's interpretation. There is no particular reason to think that he is, though his increasingly conflicted involvement in the analysis suggests that it is not out of the question. However Freud is or is not looking at the beginning of this exchange, Dora's question "Why not?" attempts to move the encounter away from a doctor-patient relationship and into a flirtatious and sexually-charged exchange -- perhaps acknowledging an interest that Freud attempts to conceal. In order to prevent Dora from successfully shifting their relationship onto a different footing, Freud highlights his professional identity with the peculiar phrase, "You know I'm an institution." He uses his professional identity as a shield against Dora's sexuality and the odd decision to characterize himself as an "institution" implies that he is somehow more than human and thus not vulnerable to ordinary human desires and failings. It is an unusual move on Cixous' part to use the image of Freud as an institution, for at the time of the Dora case he was not yet an institution in the way that he would become later in his life. He had already published *The Interpretation of Dreams*, but a great deal of the work that made his reputation and permanently

associated him with psychoanalysis was still before him. Freud at the turn of the century was not an institution in the way that he would be by the 1970s: the word has far more power for Cixous' modern audience than it would have for Dora in the world of the play.

Dora picks up this idea of Freud as an institution and turns Freud's defense back against him when she decides to end her treatment. She tells him, "Dear doctor, you are an institution, so respect the will and opinion of a patient who wishes you well" (31). In addition to the word 'institution,' Dora deliberately invokes their doctor-patient relationship, creating distance between herself and Freud's stuttering outrage at her decision. It is perhaps a kind of revenge against Freud, an attempt to 'put him in his place,' but she simultaneously acknowledges that he *is* an institution -- she turns his professional identity against him, but in order to do so she must acknowledge his personal stature.

Cixous dramatizes the moment that Freud could not or would not portray in his text, the moment where Dora seizes control and ends their relationship, leaving Freud gasping for arguments, rationalizations, words. He weathers her initial announcement fairly well, but is left speechless in the face of her persistent rejection:

DORA: Here's my revenge; I'll go it 'alone.' I'll get better 'alone.' And I decided to leave you on that particular date by myself. It'll be January 1, 1900.

FREUD: Listen. . . Your decision. . . We had decided. . .

DORA: No.

FREUD: You know. . . I'll admit. . . I'm astounded. But I expected it. I had never thought it out. I could have sworn. How well I know her! Too well! (31)

Freud is undone, not by Dora's decision to end her analysis, but by her suggestion that she does not need him, that she can heal herself. He fumbles for words, imploring Dora to listen but unable to produce anything coherent; the moment is a powerful reversal of the Dora case, where Freud tells Dora's story, and of Dora's own hysterical symptoms -- this time it is Freud who cannot speak. By the end of the exchange, however, he is already beginning to regain his



equilibrium -- and he has made a telling shift into the third person. He ceases to speak *to* Dora and instead begins to speak *about* her. He is already adopting the voice in which he will write Dora's story.

Cixous also has the courage -- some might say, the audacity -- to create a dream for the interpreter of dreams. The Voice of the Play (Freud's own voice) declaims:

Doctor Freud could have dreamt this, at the end of December, 1899. Dora is an exuberant girl, eighteen or nineteen years old. She has something contradictory and strange about her which is attractive. A healthy complexion but a rigid mouth, a girl's forehead, fixed icy eyes. She looks like those hidden cupids, vengeful and dangerous. Doctor Freud cannot take his eyes off her. Dora, holding him by the hand tightly, like an irritated governess, led him to the edge of the mountain lake which she pointed out to him with one finger. She does not throw him into the water; but she insists that he go pick a bouquet of the brilliant white flowers growing on the other side of the lake whose scent he can smell despite their distance. Even though Freud is hesitant, he is curious, because he senses that this is a test or maybe a trap. . . Dora suddenly eyes him up and down, casts him a scornful look and turns her back on him, moving her neck in a way that overwhelms him: freely, haughtily, relentlessly. Then, without any warning, she raises her dress in a purposely seductive gesture which slightly reveals her ankle, and she walks across the lake, stepping on hundreds of bones. Something prevents Freud from doing the same.(19)

By claiming that Freud 'could' have dreamt this, Cixous carries her audience with her into the realm of possibility. Dora is re-envisioned through the eyes of Freud's unconscious mind and Cixous asserts that it is the very things that set her apart as strange or different that make her attractive to Freud. The description is a study in contrasts: her "healthy complexion" is opposed by a "rigid mouth" while her "girl's forehead" conflicts with her "fixed icy eyes." There is something simultaneously open and innocent and cold and repressed about Dora; she is a "cupid," a goddess of love, but she is also "vengeful and dangerous." This "vengeful" Dora echoes the Dora from the end of Freud's case history, who enacts her revenge on Freud, her father and Herr K.

The way that Freud ‘cannot take his eyes off her’ recalls Dora’s question earlier in the play: “Why are you looking at me that way?” In the world of the unconscious, Freud is unable to defend himself; his fascination with Dora is obvious. His gaze is clearly the gaze of desire.

The imagery of the governess has particular resonance for Cixous. In the dialogue with Catherine Clément at the end of *La Jeune Née*, she calls the governess “The seductress. She is in the hole in the social cell; ‘it’ goes through ‘that,’ it goes through her body. In ‘Dora’ what was terrifying was that these archetypal servants were put by Freud himself in ‘the maid’s room’ -- that is, in the notes” (150). The governess is a figure on the threshold, exiled and discounted, yet still present and of vital importance. Jane Gallop picks up this imagery and takes it further: “As a threatening representative of the symbolic, the economic, the extrafamilial, the maid must be both seduced (assimilated) and abandoned (expelled)” (216). The governess occupies a position that is both threatening and vulnerable, as well as charged with sexuality. The dream that Cixous creates for Freud puts Dora in the position of the governess, an expression of the belief that Freud sees Dora as the same kind of threatening threshold figure.

The imagery of the lake and the flowers is curious. The lake is identified as some kind of challenge that Dora points out to him: crossing it one must pass over hundreds of bones, which suggests that it is somehow connected with death. The smell of the white flowers can be sensed from across the lake; whatever the prize may be, it is one that can be clearly perceived though it is distant in space and time. The description of the flowers focuses on their beauty and their sweet smell -- in other words, on their sensual qualities. The obvious answer seems to be that the lake is a representation of the unconscious, a realm haunted by mortality and sexuality. Dora first sends Freud in search of the flowers then goes herself: they may represent the understanding and reclamation of her sexuality that will cure her.

The action of turning her back foreshadows Dora's actions at the end of the play, when she scorns Freud and abandons him. She remains desirable even in the act of rejection. Lifting her skirt as she crosses the lake prefigures another future event, her response to Herr K being knocked down by a car in front of her. On that occasion, she "walked across the road lifting her elegant dress with her fingertips in a gesture that barely revealed her ankles" (32). The appearance of this imagery in Freud's dream suggests that, in Freud's mind at least, Freud is substituted for Herr K and vice versa.

A few lines later, Freud says, "The worst was he felt ridiculous from the moment that the greatest dream was emerging from the depths of his being" (20). The idea of the "greatest dream" immediately leads one to *The Interpretation of Dreams* and thence to the specimen dream, the dream of Irma. It was, of course, the dream that unlocked the secrets of dream interpretation for Freud. But Cixous also seems to be associating the "greatest dream" with the dream she has created for Freud -- the dream of the governess and of the quest across the lake of bones for the white flowers. If Cixous intends to propose this as a new specimen dream, then she asks her audience to consider not only Dora, but Freud himself and beyond Freud, psychoanalysis, in a different light.

### **Sexual knowledge**

Hélène Cixous' Dora play draws on the anxiety in the source text about gendered knowledge and feminine secrets. However, Cixous gives this anxiety to Dora, where it was Freud's own anxiety in the original text. Just as Freud was tormented by the idea that there was a sphere of knowledge that was closed off to him, Dora is tormented by the idea that she does not possess knowledge which is properly hers -- she does not know how to be a woman.

Throughout the play, Dora consistently presents her problem as one of knowledge and understanding. The threat presented by Herr K is one that she *does* understand; she says, “As soon as I understood Herr K’s intentions, I interrupted him. I slapped him in the face and I hurried away. I hurried away, I slapped him, I cut short his intent. I understood his words” (4). Dora claims to understand both his intentions and his words -- she understands both what he means to do and why he frames his intentions in the way that he does. In response to this understanding, she can take action: slap his face and flee. A few lines later, she reveals what Herr K’s words were that she understood: “He said: ‘You know that my wife means nothing to me.’ As soon as I realized Herr K’s intent, I slapped him in the face and hurried away” (4). Morag Shiach sees this moment of understanding as crucial to understanding Dora’s hysteria. She writes, “Dora recognizes that she is being placed within a series of substitutions which make of her a desirable object, but she also realizes that in taking up the place assigned to her as woman she risks, like Herr K’s wife, becoming nothing” (113). Dora’s hysteria, therefore, is interpreted as her protest against taking her place in the chain of substitution, her rebellion against ‘meaning nothing.’

Dora may understand the masculine threat that echoes in the words of Herr K and her father, but she is overwhelmingly anxious about her lack of knowledge in the traditionally feminine sphere. She pleads, “Tell me more, tell me all, everything. All the things that women know how to do: make jam, make love, put on make-up, bake pastries, adopt babies, cook meat, dress a bird. I saw my grandmothers do these things when I was little. But me, do I know how to do them? I should learn” (12). For Dora, knowledge of ‘everything’ is equated with knowledge of sexuality, femininity and domestic activity. She understands how men think, but she does not understand what women do. Later in the play, Dora makes this distinction explicit,

contrasting “That’s what men seem to think” with “It’s all women’s work” (16). In Dora’s mind, men think and women work; she can speak with authority about what men think but when it comes to women’s work she is left pleading in the dark. She “saw [her] grandmother’s do these things” but has lost the knowledge of how to do them herself. Dora does not know how to do all the things that women know how to do and therefore, in her own mind at least, cannot truly be a woman.

Freud may unintentionally identify the crux of Dora’s problem when he says, “The secret lies in your mother” (17). He goes on to identify the mother with a competition for the father’s love, but this is not the ‘secret’ that Dora associates with her mother. Dora associates the feminine knowledge that she yearns for with her *grandmothers*, not with her mother. Her mother is the break in the chain of knowledge; she is either unable or unwilling to pass the secrets of feminine knowledge on to her daughter. The ‘secret’ that lies with Dora’s mother is not a secret of sexual competition, but the secrets of feminine knowledge. Dora stands before the image of the Madonna, the universal mother, and pleads, “I beg you, give to me. Do something for me. Tell me the words that give birth” (13). In the wreckage of her relationship with her own mother, Dora is painfully desperate for the knowledge she believes she is lacking. She desperately desires “the words that give birth” -- the knowledge of that most mysterious and most miraculous of feminine secrets, the creation of new life. Dora the hysteric is sterile, unable to find the right words -- words that her mother never taught her.

Dora’s most desperate desire is for the knowledge of how to be a woman, for a maternal figure to tell her the secret; consequently, her attachment to Frau K is in a large part rooted in her belief that Frau K understands these secrets and can share them with her. When she first explains her attraction to Frau K, she says, “I thought she must know how to do everything that

women are supposed to be good at” (6). Frau K is thus explicitly identified as the possessor of the feminine knowledge that Dora desires. Tellingly, this knowledge is still associated with activity: Frau K does not merely ‘know,’ she ‘knows how to do.’ Their subsequent relationship is based upon an exchange of knowledge: “I asked her questions about pregnancy and giving birth. And she liked to satisfy my curiosity, to tell me about virginity and having children, about those kinds of things” (29). Frau K has in some part justified Dora’s faith in her. She reveals the hidden knowledge of sexuality, she ‘satisfies Dora’s curiosity’ about sex and pregnancy.

Symbolically, Frau K occupies the same role in Dora’s life as Freud himself: she is the giver and interpreter of knowledge. In a parody of the psychoanalytic contract, she says to Dora, “You know you can tell me everything and ask me anything. There’s nothing I would hide from you” (10). The freedom to say anything is one of the cornerstones of psychoanalysis and Frau K’s pledge to hide nothing from Dora suggests the same bond of trust that must exist between analyst and patient. Cixous also gives Frau K the line, “Me, I call a spade a spade” (11), an obvious parallel of Freud’s “*J’appelle un chat un chat*” (*Dora* 41). Moreover, the play often substitutes Frau K for Freud, at one point allowing her to take his place as the Voice of the Play (28) and involving her in dialogues with Dora that mimic the leading questions of Freudian analysis.

Frau K, however, ultimately betrays her confidential relationship with Dora. Dora has extracted a promise from her:

DORA: Don’t tell anyone, the things I know. Swear you won’t.  
FRAU K: I promise. (12)

Frau K betrays this promise by betraying Dora’s illicit sexual knowledge to her husband. In fact, she betrays both parts of their implicit contract by revealing Dora’s knowledge and by denying Dora access to her own knowledge. Dora implores her:

DORA: I'm standing here! Before you. I'm waiting. If only! if only you would tell me!  
FRAU K: But I have nothing to say.  
DORA: All that you know. All that I don't know. Let me give you that love. (11)

In response to Dora's anguished pleading, Frau K claims that she has nothing to say, no knowledge to share. Dora's deepest desire is for knowledge and Frau K thwarts that desire. Dora even equates the exchange of knowledge with love -- but Frau K spurns her love.

The other side of Dora's anxiety about knowledge is her anxiety about the knowledge that she does have. Dora is able to correctly interpret the words and actions of those around her and she has also gained information through her reading. It is this knowledge -- a knowledge that is somehow inappropriate -- that she begs Frau K to keep secret. But Frau K does not keep her secret, and the revelation of this knowledge exposes her to Herr K's judgement: "A girl who reads such books cannot claim a man's respect" (10). The knowledge that Dora has acquired has made her a sort of social pariah, no longer worthy of respect; she is somehow no longer pure. However, one of Herr K's later comments may offer insight into the true motives behind his judgemental attitude: "A girl interested in such things cannot claim a man's respect. She read Mantegazza. She knows more about these things than you do" (12). Herr K's real problem is not Dora's interest in sexual matters, it is the threatening possibility that she might know more than he does. The information that Dora possesses exposes her to the condemnation of others who find her knowledge somehow threatening.

As Dora's analyst, Freud -- like Frau K -- occupies a privileged place as the giver and interpreter of knowledge. However, Freud is already working at a double disadvantage: he does not possess the feminine knowledge that Dora craves, nor does he realize precisely what it is that she wants so badly. Freud's inability to grasp her problem leads to a growing frustration on Dora's part:

FREUD: The secret lies in your mother. What role does your mother play? In the past, she competed with you for your father's love.

DORA: I "knew" that "you" would say that!

FREUD: So you know who replaces whom.

DORA: (growing weary) Knowledge. Knowing. But *nobody knows* anything. What does it mean? To know? Do I know what I know, do I know it? Nothing means anything. (17)

In the face of Freud's continuing focus on issues that she believes to be of secondary importance, Dora becomes frustrated with knowledge itself. By taunting Freud -- "I 'knew' that 'you' would say that!" -- she challenges assumptions about who does and does not have knowledge and claims for herself a place among those who can correctly interpret information. Yet she has been plagued from the beginning by all that she does not know, Frau K has already failed her and now she is beginning to realize that Freud does not possess the knowledge she desires either -- "nobody knows anything." The validity of knowledge itself is called into question. What do we know? How do we know it? Ultimately, is anything at all knowable?

Even at his best as an analyst, Freud is unable to help Dora find the knowledge she is seeking. As Freud tries to lead her to reevaluate her memories, Dora demands:

DORA: Tell me what you know.

FREUD: I don't "know" anything.

DORA: What good does that do? What are you trying to get me to say?

FREUD: . . . To make you understand. (17-8)

Freud tries to get Dora to discover knowledge for herself, to come to understanding from a different perspective. He insists, rightly, that he does not "know" anything; he has inferred things, but the knowledge must come from Dora. Frustrated with Freud's demands and sensing that he is trying to lead her to a certain interpretation, Dora indulges in an outburst that questions the worth of Freud's method and implicitly accuses him of trying to manipulate her perspective. Freud, however, firmly believes that he is only helping her to understand herself.



Freud and Dora tread a rocky path as the play draws to a close and Dora decides to abandon her analysis. However, Cixous gives Freud one final moment of insight into the crux of Dora's dilemma:

FREUD: Maybe you know too much? Or in a way, not enough?

DORA: (mockingly) And if that were true? If I knew too much. Always too much? A bit more than all of you?

FREUD: No. I'd say not enough. (31)

Dora's mocking comments are a response to the Freud who has apparently sided with her oppressors and tried to force his interpretation upon her, but Freud displays a moment of profound insight here. Dora's tragedy is that she knows too much -- has too much illicit knowledge, understands too well the relationships and motives of the people around her -- and yet too little -- too little of the characteristically feminine knowledge that she feels she needs to establish a stable identity. In the final analysis, Dora is crippled not by what she knows but by what she does not know: she craves feminine knowledge and yet cannot obtain it. Freud does not have it and Frau K has refused to share it. Her mother is absent, a mere cipher; the Madonna may be the archetypal mother, but she is a mother who is beyond both sex and death; at every turn, Dora is cut off from the knowledge that she seeks.

### **The object of desire (Freud's blindspot)**

Quite early in the play, Dora's father comments that Dora "felt a sort of adoration for [Frau K]" (6). Dora immediately picks up on this word, 'adoration,' and expands upon it: "Adoration. I have never seen a woman so elegant and so beautiful. How I loved to look at her! I followed her motions with my eyes" (6). From the very beginning, Dora's attraction to Frau K is shown to have a strong physical component. Frau K is immediately defined as a thing of

beauty, the object of Dora's gaze. Dora's preoccupation with the physical beauty of Frau K's body comes through despite her attempts to downplay their relationship:

FREUD: How did you feel about Frau K before the incident?

DORA: I don't know. Average [. . .] She told me. . . While I did her hair. Me. Standing behind her. The whiteness. . . of her body. (9-10)

Dora's attempt to imply that there was nothing special about her relationship to Frau K is undercut by her fascination with Frau K's body. The visual memory of Frau K's body is apparently so compelling that language breaks down in the face of it; Dora stumbles, inarticulate, over the attempt to convey the intensity of her experience and the beauty of Frau K.

Once this subject has been raised, Dora dwells for some time on Frau K's body; even as the other characters continue to debate around her, she repeats, as if to herself, "Always in white. Milky white veils. Crêpe de Chine. I saw HER. The whiteness of her body, especially her back. A very soft luster; pearly" (10). Dora is fixated on Frau K's body, especially the whiteness of her body. It is veiled and mysterious, or compared to costly pearls and fine cloth. Dora no longer speaks in coherent sentences; instead, she speaks in images, attempting to convey the aesthetic experience of viewing Frau K's body.

Dora's fascination with Frau K becomes even more obvious when she relates her experience of viewing the *Sistine Madonna* in Dresden. However, the information she relates to Freud is only a small fragment of the story that the audience sees played out on the stage. The conversation between Dora and Freud runs like this:

FREUD: What was it that captured you in the painting?

DORA: The. . . Her. . .

DORA: I shared her room, I was her confidante and even her counselor. She talked to me about all the difficulties of married life. There was nothing we wouldn't discuss.

DORA: I don't know. She just appeared before me. Her smile. As if she were smiling to herself. . .

FREUD: Two hours? What moved you?

DORA (after a long silence): Her.

DORA: Her body, a delightful white glow. Tiny breasts, the skin on her belly very smooth.

DORA: Her way of looking at herself. Of loving herself. Of not suffering. Of not looking at me. Of looking at me, so calmly. With that smile.

DORA: I owe her everything. I used to cherish her.

FREUD: How can you be attracted to the man that your dearest friend told you so many bad things about?

DORA: They weren't made for each other. (11-12)

However, above, below, behind and throughout Dora's conversation with Freud, another scene is enacted -- the two scenes parallel each other on the stage. The *Sistine Madonna* is revealed and then the Madonna morphs into an image of Frau K. Dora and Frau K enact a scene of desire, even as Dora continues her conversation with Freud. While Freud waits for an answer to his question, "Two hours? What moved you?" Dora pleads with Frau K to "Let me give you that love" (11). When Freud asks, "How can you be attracted to the man that your dearest friend told you so many bad things about?" Dora speaks in an aside to Frau K, "She's an intelligent woman, superior to the men who surround her, and adorably beautiful! . . . how white your back is! and your skin! How I love you! [. . .] You cannot imagine how I love you: if I were a man, I would marry you, I would carry you away and I would marry you, I would know just how to please you" (12).

Freud is able to perceive only that part of Dora's experience which she chooses to reveal to him -- Cixous reveals far more to the audience than Dora reveals to Freud. However, Freud also fails to adequately interpret the information that Dora does give him. Dora's comments about being a confidante and counselor and the recurrence of the 'white body' imagery show the connection she is making between the Madonna and Frau K. Freud completely fails to pick up on this connection -- either unable or unwilling to -- and instead attempts to redirect the conversation back to Herr K. Freud's avoidance is so marked that it seems almost deliberate;

Dora's attachment to Frau K may be a subject he has no wish to explore further until he is forced to.

Dora's attraction to Frau K is obvious to the reader from the very early moments of the play, although Freud, appropriately, does not notice the significance of Frau K until nearly the end of the play. Cixous cleverly mirrors the progression of the Dora case: just as Freud the analyst does not realize in time the crucial importance of Dora's relationship with Frau K, so Freud the character does not ask in time the crucial question, "Why is it that you've always so generously spared Frau K, the one who did slander you, while you persecute the others with an almost sly vengeance. . .?" (29).

Freud has finally hit upon the really important question, but he does not yet realize the depths of its significance. Dora's response is telling: "She had gentle, slow gestures that I liked a lot. One day a long time ago, I sprained my right foot falling on the staircase. My foot got swollen. She had to bandage it up. I had to keep off it for several weeks. She kept me company and spoke to me as if I were her friend. She confided in me" (29). She reveals the entire progression of her attraction to Frau K, if Freud could only see it. It begins as a physical and aesthetic attraction to the way that Frau K moves, then expands to encompass Dora's fascination with the maternal, caregiving aspect. Frau K bandages Dora's foot, displaying the healing and care that Dora associates with a uniquely feminine knowledge. Finally, Frau K offers to share that knowledge with Dora: she confides in her, speaks to her as a friend, initiates her into the sorority of feminine knowledge and female communication. Dora reveals her attraction to Frau K in both its physical and emotional aspects, but Freud is unable to accept that revelation. Instead, he turns the conversation back to Herr K, provoking Dora's decision to end her analysis.

## **Dora's voice**

One of the most striking aspects of Cixous' text is the way she transfers much of the initiative in the play to Dora. In the very early moments of the play, Dora's exchange with Freud clearly shows that she has appropriated his role of asking telling questions:

DORA: Why did I keep silent the first days after the incident by the lake?

FREUD: To whom do you think you should ask that question?

DORA: Why did I then, suddenly, tell my parents about it?

FREUD: Do you know why? (2-3)

In Cixous' play it is Dora that points out the ambiguities in her own behavior, moving directly to the heart of the issue. She has the insight and the courage to ask the questions that need to be asked. Shortly afterwards, she turns on her father and tells him, "You understand me but you aren't honest. You have a deceitful personality. You think only of your own satisfaction. I am not honest. I scold myself for being unjust to you" (3). Once again, Dora displays a keen insight, this time into the motivations of others. Moreover, she has the courage to tell the truth as she sees it. Elsewhere in the play, it is Dora that initiates confrontations, Dora that takes the lead in conversations, and Dora that fearlessly lays open the contents of her mind to the audience. Cixous allows Dora to take the initiative, and to do it with insight and courage.

In Freud's text, Dora is robbed of her voice twice: first by her hysterical aphonia and again by Freud himself when he undertakes to write her story. In a sense, Cixous' play gives Dora back her voice, allowing her to speak her mind and tell her own story. The story is no longer dominated by Freud and Freud's vision of Dora. But in the course of the play, Dora explicitly rejects the idea that she could write her own story:

FREUD: Do you like to write? Yes.

DORA: No. (8)

Freud assumes she will seize the opportunity to write, but Dora confounds his expectations by rejecting it. She spurns the idea of writing, and with it, the chance to write her own narrative. At the end of the play, Freud asks the question again, but Dora rejects the idea of writing again:

FREUD: I'd like to hear from me. (*This slip of the tongue is not necessarily noticeable.*)  
Write to me.

DORA: Write? . . . That's not my business. (32)

Freud again offers her the opportunity to take up a pen and tell him her story, but Dora again rejects it. This time, she reveals more than a simple 'No.' She claims that writing is not her business. Cixous' Dora abdicates her right to tell her own story; she leaves the floor open for Freud to tell it for her, as he eventually will. Indeed, Freud's slip of the tongue foreshadows the fact that it is he that will eventually tell Dora's story to the world, even as he attempts to persuade Dora to continue telling him her story. He may want to hear the continuation of Dora's story, but more than this he wants to hear himself tell Dora's story.

Cixous' portrayal of Freud is necessarily colored by the feeling that he has somehow appropriated Dora's story; her project depends on putting Dora back in the center of her story, and Freud must therefore be pushed off to the side (isolated on the stage). However, this activity is complicated by Cixous' consciousness of the debt she owes to Freud. Freud's voice is everywhere in this play: in the lines given to him and Dora, in the Voice of the Play itself. Cixous' attempt to 'save' Dora from Freud's text requires that she dramatize Freud's failings, his blindspots, and his unconscious desires. However, the final lines of the play suggest that Dora's story is also Freud's tragedy: "There's no greater sorrow than to remember love. And Freud knew that" (32). Speaking in the voice of the play, Freud finally vocalizes the knowledge he has been unwilling to face throughout the play. In giving Dora back her voice, she also frees Freud to speak. Re-interpreting Freud's text from a feminist perspective, Cixous critiques his attempt

to tell Dora's story, but she nevertheless acknowledges the importance he gives to personal narratives.

## Conclusion

Attempting to write a historical personage presents a double challenge: an author must successfully re-create their voice and then turn that voice to his or her own purposes, transforming them from a real person into a character. It is not enough to simply label a character 'Sigmund Freud' -- for the narrative to be believable, the author must appropriate Freud's voice and ideas in a meaningful and convincing way. Hélène Cixous lifts her portrayal of Freud from the pages of the Dora case itself; many of the lines that she gives to Freud are lines that he wrote in the case history. She transforms them -- and him-- by recontextualizing them, by allowing the audience to view Freud from a different angle, in a different light. Cixous is by no means alone in this approach: D. M. Thomas puts Freud's writings on the Anna O. case at the heart of his novel, *The White Hotel*. In a sense, those who approach Freud from a critical perspective do essentially the same thing. Writers like Shoshana Felman, Erik Erikson, Toril Moi and Steven Marcus all draw pieces of Freud's writing out of his texts and try to offer a new perspective on Freud's ideas. They build their arguments out of the pieces of himself that Freud has given them; they echo Freud's voice in an attempt to better understand it.

### Critical/creative writing

It seems that everyone is engaged in re-writing Freud: the critics as well as the creative writers. They create a 'new' Freud out of the pieces of himself that he reveals in his writings, reconstituting them into a Freud created out of their vision of him. However, this activity of re-imagining Freud is entirely different from the reductive action of popular culture, which takes pieces of Freud and tries to pretend that they represent him in his entirety. If the popular



caricatures of Freud are a way to neutralize the threat that he presents, then re-writing Freud is a way of confronting and exploring that threat. At its best, writing Freud is both critical *and* creative: it engages his ideas in a challenging way and recreates him as a dynamic individual.

This is the work of interpretation, the work that Freud himself did in relation to Dora. He drew out of her the details of her story and reconstituted them as a coherent narrative, then offered that narrative to her as a cure. He goes even further, combining the narrative he constructed for Dora with the narrative of his treatment of Dora to form a case history -- a story that is at once Dora's and his own. He creates himself as the storyteller and the teller of truth, as the archaeologist unearthing bits of information long disregarded and piecing them together to form -- a work of art. It is impossible to ignore the artfulness of Freud's work, the fact that the stories he tells are created and re-created, the works of human hands or, rather, human minds. Those who write Freud must take their places in turn as storytellers, archaeologists and creators.

### **The talking cure**

Psychoanalysis, the discipline that Freud created, is rooted in this construction of stories. Freud retold Dora's story to her, and told it in an attempt to *cure* her. Psychoanalysis is a discipline that constructs and reconstructs narratives, shaping the raw material of the unconscious mind into something coherent and meaningful. Freud tried to give Dora a story to believe in, recognizing that narrative is the way we understand our lives. We continually tell the stories of our lives, deciding in every instant what material to put in and what material to leave out. We are engaged in a lifelong process of self-interpretation, imposing shape and meaning on the seeming chaos of our lives.

Freud recognized that we are plagued by a disconnect between our conscious and unconscious minds, an alienation from ourselves. Sometimes, like Dora, we lose our voices -- lose the ability to construct the narratives of our lives. He attempted to tell her story, to return her voice to her by writing a script for her to read; he failed in part because the story he told her was the wrong story, neither the true story nor the story she needed to hear. The narrative that Freud eventually constructed out of Dora's story was written not for Dora's benefit, but for Freud's: a professional exploration of her case and an attempt to come to terms with her desertion.

All of us, as readers and writers of Freud, appropriate his story, reshaping him to fit our narrative, recreating him according to our own understanding. We attempt to tell Freud's story. . . but we are not telling it for Freud's benefit. As Freud wrote Dora's story, so we write Freud's: to confront our own resistance, to shape our own ideas, to tell our own stories -- to find the answers that we seek, or perhaps to find the questions to ask.

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